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IVAN DE BIRON

IVAN DE BIRON

*OR, THE RUSSIAN COURT IN THE MIDDLE
OF LAST CENTURY*

BY THE
AUTHOR OF "FRIENDS IN COUNCIL," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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BOOK III.



CHAPTER X.

OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION—IVAN'S PART IN IT—
AZRA'S CARE FOR IVAN.

IF the Princess Elizabeth had devoted friends, the Duchess Regent was not friendless. Before Lestocq had quitted the Princess's Palace, Ivan de Biron was endeavouring to make his way into the Duchess Regent's Palace, to warn Her Highness of the coming danger. And he succeeded in doing so.

It would have been no easy matter for a young man in Ivan's position to obtain an audience with this great lady; but revolutions, however

was much impressed by what she had heard, and quickly returned to her mistress to relate the story, adding sundry comments of her own; as to the danger of remaining perfectly quiescent. Her Highness, however, took little heed of all that she heard. She was not a woman without some sense, but seemed to be lapped in a fatal state of security, and was resolutely blind to all that was happening around her.

This, it must be remembered, was the very day after that in which that scene had occurred between the Duchess Regent and the Princess Elizabeth, when the tears and protestations of the Princess had produced so great an effect.

“My dearest love,” said the Duchess, “you are like the rest of them; this is the same story that Ostermann and the Austrian ambassador, and my poor Duke, too, are perpetually dinning into my ears. Spies must be telling something. What else are they paid for? They must invent conspiracies, whether there are any, or not. None of you understand the Princess: none of you, but myself. As long, my dear, as she has her lovers

to pay court to her, little she cares for anything else. And she is a good creature. Did you see how she fondled our dear little Ivan? She would not hurt a hair of his head for the world. Go back to the youth: thank him, and tell him that we will try to find a place for him in our household. We have heard much good of him, of his kindness formerly to those whom the Duke, his master, banished. And come back soon. I do not think the pearls should be sewed on to the robe, but should hang in tassels. It will be something new for to-morrow's ball." Thus the demented woman gave her thoughts to the frivolities of dress, at the most critical moment of her life.

Ivan was dismissed by Juliana, but at the same time, was warmly thanked by her for the information he had given. She did not tell him how lightly it had been received; but she added to his feelings of satisfaction, by letting him know the favour which the Duchess intended for him in taking him into her household.

Ivan hastened to find Azra. Each of them

was now acquainted with the ways and habits of the other. He knew in what quarter of the city her tribe of gypsies would be likely to be found at any time of the day. Seeing him, she came out of the circle, apparently to go through the accustomed fortune-telling, but in reality to inform him that, if any reliance was to be placed in what she had last heard, the outbreak of the conspiracy was fixed for that night, or the next. Their chief was quite certain of that. They were to be in the streets two hours earlier next morning. There would be crowds in all the public places. She had been at his lodgings to tell him this, but could not find him.

Ivan longed to go back to the Winter Palace with this additional information; but he was too well versed in the ways of princes, to imagine that he could, a second time in the same day, be so fortunate as to obtain an audience, even with the favourite.

He was too much troubled, however, (for, by this time he had come to have implicit confidence in all that Azra told him) to take any

rest that night. He kept watch in dark corners near the Winter Palace, and prepared for that action which he now felt certain he would have to take.

That same evening there was a certain kind of ferment at the barracks of the Preobraskenski regiment. This ferment was almost indescribable. It was as if a hive of bees had been suddenly disturbed by some intruder. In all directions there were small knots of men, who talked together in most earnest tones, and seemed to be preparing for some great enterprise.

It was a remarkable error in the Russian military system, and a most deplorable one, that it was the universal custom for almost all the officers of a regiment to sleep in different quarters from those assigned to the men.

The Preobraskenski regiment, already looked upon and favoured as household troops—in fact a sort of Prætorian Guard—was, this evening, under the command of one subaltern officer, a Scotchman, named Grews. He did not fail to notice the strange kind of excitement which pre-

vailed among the men under his command. It was with some difficulty that, partly by persuasion, partly by command, he at last induced them to go to bed ; and it was, with a presentiment of coming evil, that he himself lay down to rest.

At twelve o'clock, however, all was supremely quiet, both in those barracks, and throughout the capital. The Russians of that day, as indeed all the nations of Europe, kept very different hours from those adopted in more modern times. At the hour of midnight there was scarcely a solitary human being to be seen moving through the snow-covered streets of St. Petersburg. Midnight revels were rare in that city.

It was then that the Princess Elizabeth, accompanied only by Lestocq and by her chamberlain Woronzkow, rode forth to commence her audacious undertaking. At last that vacillating and irresolute mind had come to a fixed resolve ; and, henceforth, there was no alternative but the one depicted by Lestocq. The choice was between a convent or a throne ; or, perhaps, it might more truly be said, between that fair head being sur-

mounted by a crown, or being laid upon a headsman's block.

Silently these three conspirators moved through the streets. They reached the Preobraskenski barracks, unchallenged. It is probable that they were observed ; but, if so, the few passers-by, or the sentinels on guard at the public buildings, considered that it was but a freak of their beloved Princess ; and that safety for themselves consisted in their being careful not to observe too much, and not to recognize these daring intruders upon the stillness of night.

The Preobraskenski regiment was thoroughly prepared to receive the foremost personage of the three midnight conspirators. Upon a slight knock being given at the gate of the barracks, it was immediately opened. The thirty men of the regiment, who had long been gained over to the service of the Princess, and who had for some time ardently wished for the coming of this important crisis, rose and welcomed her, with their corporal, Grunstein, at their head. They then summoned the rest of their comrades, numbering

about two hundred and seventy, and told them that the Princess Elizabeth had come to speak to them. When they were all assembled, she made a short speech, stating her grievances, declaring her rights, and finally asking them whether they would, one and all, support her in her resolve, to claim then and there her just inheritance, the throne of Russia, and to rule them as it became the daughter of Peter the Great to rule.

There was not a moment's hesitation. Every man in the regiment was ready and willing to offer his allegiance to her.

In their enthusiasm, however, they uttered words which horrified the humane Princess. "We are ready: we will kill them all." *

Never was the comment which Lady Macbeth made, when reading her husband's letter, more applicable than to the Princess.

"What thou would'st highly,

"That would'st thou holily."

* *Matiouscheka, mouï gotovoui mouï ix vrex oubiem.*

And Elizabeth Pétrovna had a more consistent character than that of the faltering Macbeth. She indignantly replied "If you intend to act in that way, I will not go with you ;" and those of her contemporaries, or of after-historians who have studied this remarkable woman's nature closely, would have known, and know, that these were not idle words, and that, even at this perilous moment, she would have abandoned the enterprise, recognizing all the danger of such abandonment, if its success were to be attained by any sacrifice of human life.

The soldiers shouted "Let it be as you wish, and as God wishes ; but we are ready to sacrifice our lives for you."

The first thing they did, to prove the sincerity of their words, was to seize upon that loyal but unfortunate subaltern officer, the Scotchman Grews.

That done, they followed the Princess, who went straight to the Winter Palace, where the Duchess Regent, the grand Duke of Brunswick

her husband, and their infant child, the young Emperor, were lodged.

No difficulty was experienced from the guards who surrounded the palace. Upon hearing what the Princess Elizabeth proposed to do, they instantly acquiesced, as if it had been quite a matter of course, and to be expected according to the ordinary march of events in Russia.

It might have been thought that the Duchess Regent would have gained sufficient experience from her own successful conspiracy, to place but little reliance upon piquets stationed in front of her palace, and of sentinels placed at its doors.

The progress of this conspiracy bore an almost ludicrous similarity to her own ; and, like it, went to prove the uselessness of depending upon the fidelity of the Russian soldiery at that period, in such emergencies. A little dog inside the palace walls, would have been more serviceable than all these sentinels and piquets.

A detachment was sent forward, headed by Lestocq and Woronzkow, to enter the palace. It was then that Ivan, emerging from his place

of concealment, took his part in the proceedings of that night. He had seen the approach of the Princess at the head of her Preobraskenski followers. He had listened to the conference between them and the piquets on guard. He felt that all was lost for the side that he had taken ; but, losing all sight of policy, and behaving like the brave and noble youth that he really was, he resolved to peril his life, and willingly to die, if die he must, in the endeavour to give some warning to the Duchess Regent, into whose service he considered he had already entered.

It was a dark night. The conspirators rushed forward, not in any soldier-like order, but like a mob ; and Ivan found no difficulty in entering with them. He knew the ways of the palace better than they did ; and, though persistently followed by two or three of them, he reached the Grand Duchess's sleeping apartment a few moments before they did. Not in time, though, to give any warning. He turned and faced the insurgent crowd of soldiery.

In a moment he was cut down by the stroke of

a sword on his shoulder ; and, kicking his body aside, for he was in a state of insensibility, the conspirators entered the apartment.

Themselves conspirators, the Duchess Regent and her husband must have felt, when suddenly awakened by this clamour in their room that an evil time had come for them ; and that they were to undergo the same fate as that which, only one year ago, they had caused to fall upon the ex-Regent of Russia, the Duke of Courland. They made no resistance.

The Grand Duke, the Duchess Regent, the infant Emperor Ivan, and the favourite, Juliana de Mengden, were at once seized by the conspirators ; and were conveyed that night in sledges to the palace of the Princess Elizabeth, who herself returned there about three o'clock in the morning. Other arrests were then made of certain persons supposed to be especially devoted to the late dynasty, among whom was Count Ostermann, whose craft did not, on this occasion, suffice to save himself.

Ivan was carried to the Princess Elizabeth's

Palace with the Imperial captives, it being supposed that he was a person of some consequence.

During that eventful night, his movements had been sedulously watched, not by any spy, but by the loving Azra.

She had not shown herself to him, being afraid that he would send her back, but she had been more convinced of the peril in which he stood, than even he had been himself. She could not enter with the insurgent soldiers ; but she watched for their return ; and when Ivan was carried out by some of them, she followed to the Princess Elizabeth's Palace, and there in the tumult of the night she was able to gain an entrance. Ivan was taken into the presence of the Princess ; and what he had done was told her.

The magnanimous Princess, for such she was, at once said " Let the poor youth go. But see, he cannot stand. Is there any one who will take care of him ? "

They told her that his sister was in the hall ; for Azra had said that she was his sister. And the Princess replied " Give him to her, and let

him be taken wherever she wishes. But let us hear no more of him, for we will not that any one should suffer for what has been done this night.”

Then, slightly withdrawing, but there were those who heard what she said, she exclaimed, “Will there be any one so true to me, who will be ready to die for my sake, when my time shall come?”

And then the generals and the statesmen began to throng about her Imperial Majesty, and to tell her that this day was the happiest day of their lives, and the one to which they had long been looking forward. “Was she not the daughter of the greatest Sovereign that Russia had ever known? the Sovereign, indeed, who had created Russia, and made it the mighty Empire that it had been fated to be.”

On the ensuing morning, the senate and nobles of Russia were invited to attend at the Princess Elizabeth’s Palace, and to confirm her accession to the throne.

All the troops then quartered at St. Petersburg, were desired to parade outside the palace.

Neither within, nor without those walls, was the slightest objection taken by any of the persons there assembled, to the claims of the Princess Elizabeth to ascend the throne which her father had so worthily occupied.

One touching incident served to heighten the strangeness of this memorable event. The infant Emperor, delighted with the noise of the soldiers shouting for their new Sovereign, clapped his tiny hands, and did what he could to welcome the new order of things.

“Ah ! poor child,” exclaimed Elizabeth, now Empress of Russia, perhaps for the moment touched with some feeling of remorse, “you little know what this day’s work has done for you.”

Thus was completed a revolution which, even in that epoch of revolutions, was remarkable for the recklessness with which it was prepared, and for the completeness with which it was carried into execution.

BOOK IV.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT REVENGE OF THE PRINCESS MARIE ON
THE HOUSE OF BIRON—RECALL OF EXILES FROM
SIBERIA.

MEANWHILE, in Siberia, during the important and singular transactions at the Court of Russia which have been narrated, the gloomy year went round, bringing little or no hope to the exiles. They had no reason to think that the reign of the infant Emperor was likely to be disturbed. They naturally supposed that Münich, the foremost general Russia had produced in that age, a man, too, of much political dex-

terity, was not likely to allow the Duchess Regent to be deprived of power ; and, all of them, without any exception, looked forward to a long continuance of the present dynasty, and did not dare to hope otherwise than that they themselves should live and die in exile.

Strange to say, the Duke of Courland did not find his days of exile pass so miserably now as might have been expected. The daily visits of the Princess Marie were a great solace to him. These visits were never omitted. The Duke and his visitor had lived in the same circle. The Princess had been accustomed from her earliest years to listen to political discussions, and was well versed in all the principal occurrences at Court that had happened up to the time when her father and his family were banished.

The Duke of Courland was, as may have been already seen from this narrative, a very remarkable man, and had even some touch of genius in him. Indeed the favourites of monarchs mostly are remarkable men—not, necessarily, because monarchs have any particular skill in the choice

of men; but because they (the favourites in question) are chosen by one person. The favourites of assemblies, on the other hand, generally gain their power from a large manifestation of second-rate qualities; and whatever genius they have, is as likely to be a hindrance as a help to them. By the word 'favourites,' as used above, favourite ministers are chiefly meant, not favourite companions.

It was something new to the Duke, hitherto all-powerful and greatly feared by all who came near him, even by the late Empress herself, to find some one who talked to him without reticence, and with perfect fearlessness, and who did not hesitate to speak openly to him of some of his own doings. He did not know who she was. Hated though he was, and avoided by all his fellow-exiles, with the exception of the Princess, he still might easily have succeeded in discovering her name. She, however, had told him from the first, that if he attempted to make this discovery, he would see no more of her; and this threat proved sufficient to restrain his curiosity.

She became very dear to him. He did not like to tell himself how dear she had become. Perhaps love is never so potent as when it seizes upon those who have passed their first youth, or even those who have passed the prime of life. The choice made is then likely to be thoroughly suited to the nature of the man; and any intellectual gifts on the part of the woman are likely to be more attractive to a man of this age than to a younger person. Besides, there is a feeling that as life is not likely to be very long, this late love is the last thing to be clung to; and that after it, should it be lost, all will be desolation.

It could not be said, however, that the Duke loved this young woman. Certainly if he did so, it was unconsciously. But he thought her the most attractive person he had ever known. He looked forward to her coming,—counting the hours, even the minutes which preceded it; and he dreaded her departure, inventing numerous excuses to delay it, feeling bitterly the utter loneliness that then fell upon him. The Duke was a man of much fascination of manner,

which he then exerted to the uttermost. Not without some effect. The Princess herself began to feel less and less irksome these visits, which she had first made from a sense of duty, or rather, we might say, if we looked narrowly into her motives, from a strange desire for a great and noble revenge—revenge, not only upon the chief enemy of her father and his family, but also upon her lover Ivan, whom she still accused of having basely deceived her by the concealment of his name and lineage.

Such was the state of things in that obscure little town in Siberia, Pelem, where some of the principal personages of our story were at that time residing.

A great change was, however, preparing for them—a change very frequent in Russian history. In fact, during that century, exile to Siberia was merely a Russian mode of “going out of office.” It was a mode practicable only in a country of that extent—in fact a little world of its own; and certainly it was a better system than that adopted in French revolutions, and other like

convulsions in other countries, when the going out of office mostly accompanied, or shortly preceded, the loss of life as well as of power. And there are some zealots perhaps, who, living under constitutional governments, and fondly desiring that those who govern should have more power of government, would not be sorry if there were a Siberia attached to their own country to which the chiefs of the defeated party might occasionally be sent, instead of being suffered to remain, and thus to form a powerful and vexatious opposition, able to thwart the policy of their successors in office.

The inhabitants of Pelem were pursuing their daily labours—those labours, which, in their former and happier days, they could hardly have supposed themselves capable of executing—while couriers were speeding from St. Petersburg with orders for their immediate recall. These orders were almost indiscriminate. The Duke of Courland was to be recalled; for, as before stated, he had always kept on good terms during his tenure of power with the Princess

Elizabeth. Again, as was natural, the daughter of Peter the Great was anxious to recall the Menschikoff's, and all the friends, favourites and servants of her father, who had been banished during the reign that succeeded his.

Among these exiles were the Prince Serbatoff and all the Prince's family, including of course, the Princess Maria Andréevna.

It was early in the morning of a dreary day that the Duke of Courland paced up and down his chamber in a most restless manner. Every now and then he went to the window, but returned to resume his weary paces up and down the room, with a most dissatisfied expression of countenance. Though early, it was an hour later than the time when he was usually visited by the Princess Marie. She had never been so late before ; and the Duke's mind was filled with the most gloomy apprehensions. He feared that she was ill. Anything else, he said to himself, he could bear but this. There were unaccustomed noises, too ; but, as the windows looked only into the courtyard at the rear of the house, no-

thing could be seen from them which could explain the noise in the streets; and it showed the Duke's absence of mind, or rather his unconscious return to the habits of former days, that he had gone often to the window, as if it had been one in his room at the Summer Palace of St. Petersburg.

He did not venture to show himself on the flat roof of the house which might have enabled him to understand the cause of this delay in the coming of the Princess, and of the noises in the street which became more and more defined.

His anxiety was soon relieved in a very unexpected manner. A courier came to him, announcing the glad tidings of his recall; and almost immediately afterwards a letter was brought to him from the Princess Marie. It was a cold, polite letter. It told him that there was no occasion for her seeing him again. His Highness would have no need now of any services which she could render. Such as she had rendered, were given to one who was, yesterday, only a poor exile like herself.

The letter was signed by her in full: "The Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff."

The Duke shivered as he read this letter. "So then," he said, "this was the daughter of one of my bitterest enemies; and such was her revenge. And it was all revenge, I fear. Some womanly pity, mayhap; but nothing more." The thought crossed his mind that he would have been contented with a longer exile, had she been there to share it, even though it was but pity that brought her to his side.

Being now a free man, and caring no longer for the aversion or the hatred of his fellow-exiles, he rushed from the house, and inquired for the dwelling of the Serbatoffs. But, to his dismay they had already gone. It was the Princess Marie, who had skilfully contrived that the intelligence of the Duke's recall should not reach him until she and her family had quitted the town. The Duke followed with all speed. A memorable incident occurred in the course of his journey. At a bridge, near Kazan, his sledge was stopped, as another sledge, escorted by

soldiers, had arrived on the bridge at the same moment. In it was Count Münnich. Each of the two great rivals and bitter enemies, recognized the countenance of the other. They did not speak; but, lifting their caps, bowed with grave politeness. The Duke pursued his journey to St. Petersburg; while the Count went on to Pelem, to occupy the very house to which he had sent his rival, and the plan of which he had designed with his own hand.

Such were the vicissitudes of fortune which befell Russian statesmen at that period, and long afterwards.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER II.

AZRA'S CARE OF IVAN—HE WRITES TO THE EMPRESS
ELIZABETH—THE RESULT OF THAT LETTER.

THE story now returns to St. Petersburg, the time being that which immediately succeeded the successful enterprise of Elizabeth to place herself upon the throne. For the first few days after that event, the state of affairs at St. Petersburg was such that any bold attempt made by the partisans of the late Duchess Regent, and the late infant Emperor, might have greatly embarrassed the new government. The child-

hood of the deposed Emperor was much in his favour; and there were statesmen who would have been very glad to avail themselves of his long minority to consolidate their own power, and to promote their own views. The population of St. Petersburg would have looked on with a feeling of comparative indifference, for Elizabeth's popularity rested with the soldiery, and chiefly with those favoured regiments, such as the Preobraskenski, which had all along been devoted to her cause.

No daring attempt, however, was made by the partisans of the Duchess Regent and her family; and the new Empress was at liberty to employ herself in rewarding those who had gained for her the Empire, and in punishing those whose only fault was their fidelity to the late Duchess Regent. Lestocq and Grunstein, and even the common soldiers of the Preobraskenski regiment, were highly favoured and rewarded. The Empress's opponents were condemned to death; but Elizabeth, true to her intention to abolish capital punishment in Russia, commuted all

these sentences of death to the lesser condemnation of exile to Siberia.

As was to be expected, Marshal Münnich and Count Ostermann were among those statesmen who were considered to be most dangerous to the new dynasty. They had been immediately arrested. Each of these great men bore his reverse with singular fortitude and even daring. The Count's sentence was not commuted until he had absolutely been brought to the block; and the Marshal, knowing what a farce, for the most part, judicial examinations are, when the judges are taken from a dominant party and the accused are prominent persons of a defeated party, bade them write anything they liked in the nature of articles of accusation, and he would sign them, as, indeed, he did.

The fate of these statesmen does not concern this story so much as the fate of certain minor personages, and especially that of Ivan de Biron. When taken to his miserable lodgings, it need hardly be said that he was there carefully tended by his so-called sister, Azra the gypsy.

It has been remarked by some shrewd observers of human nature that a certain kind of familiarity (the familiarity, for instance, which must exist in a sick room) endears men to women; but has not a similar effect or, at any rate, not so great an effect upon men with regard to women.

Azra's weary watchings of the wounded man only rendered the poor gypsy girl more fond of him. She had much to endure. During the fever that beset him in the first few days of his illness, he was occasionally delirious; and in his ravings spoke much of his beloved Marie.

The liking of Azra had been sudden, as was to be expected from her ardent Eastern nature; but it had been greatly fostered and increased, most unintentionally on Ivan's part, by his conduct and bearing towards her. A man is seldom more respectful to all women than when he is very much in love with any one. Now Azra, the beauty of her tribe, had not been without many lovers both among her own people

and amongst strangers. But their wooing had been of a very rough character, and had always disgusted the refined nature of the girl. On the contrary, Ivan who had always been most respectful to her, treating her as a faithful friend, and somewhat as a brother, had thus greatly added to his attractiveness. She felt that she had never before been respected; and this respectful bearing on his part had a wonderful charm for her.

Ivan's wound had not been of a serious character. The meagre fare and the constant exercise he had taken, for he might be said to have lived in the streets since his return to St. Petersburg, aided his recovery. Azra was not only his chief nurse, but his only doctor. Like the other women of her tribe, she was familiar with the treatment of wounds; a knowledge gained in the course of the feuds that occasionally arose between the gypsies, the police, the soldiery, and, generally, the lower classes in the great towns of Russia, which feuds sometimes led to very severe encounters.

Azra, would not have trusted to her own skill in caring for this life so precious to her, if she had possessed the means of paying for a doctor. All her little earnings went to provide the payment for the lodgings, which was inexorably demanded week by week, and also for the food and medicaments which were necessary for the patient.

The new reign of the Empress Elizabeth had now lasted three weeks, and had been consolidated without any serious difficulty, when Ivan, now recovered from his wound, became perfectly conscious of his condition and anxious to do something for his livelihood. During the last week he had been fully aware of all that Azra had done for him, and that he had been supported by her precarious earnings. She had never been able to remain a whole day with him; and it was wonderful that she had had the strength and endurance to go through her usual toil, and, at the same time, to minister for several hours in the day, and for a great part of the night, to the many wants of her patient.

A curious scene was now enacted between Ivan and Azra. It was the middle of the day, and Azra had stolen away from her gypsy friends, having secreted a portion of their common meal. The gypsies that morning had not been successful in their labours, and not a single copeck had fallen to Azra's share. Some sustenance, however, was provided for the pair by the food which Azra had brought with her; but that beverage so dear to all who live in Russia, tea, was not forthcoming. Ivan rummaged in his pockets in that hope, so often proving vain, but still always prevalent among very poor people, that some well-disposed small coin may have secreted itself in an obscure corner, with a view to being joyfully welcomed on some dire occasion.

Azra imitated the movements of Ivan, and explored the capacious pockets which all gypsies, male and female, are wont to carry about with them. After several fruitless expeditions into the recesses of their pockets, the young pair were obliged to confess to one another their

utter impecuniosity, which confession they accompanied with an immoderate burst of laughter. Oh! what a happy thing is youth! It can find something to laugh at even in the direst state of misfortune. As Béranger says,

Dans un grenier qu'on est bien à vingt ans.

“Something must be done,” exclaimed Ivan, feeling that he must take the lead in the conversation.

“Yes, dear Ivan” (she had for some time indulged herself in calling him “dear Ivan,” though he, on rare occasions only, called her “dear Azra”).

Ivan was the least vain of young men; but still a thought, not altogether unwelcome, but which was to be resolutely repressed, would darkly intrude itself upon him, that he and this poor girl were becoming a little more intimate than would be desirable for her or for him, and certainly for the Princess Marie, whose presence he did not feel sure, would have been quite acceptable on these occasions.

“Yes, Ivan, something must be done; but it need not be done by you, dear. I can now leave you for much longer times, and so shall gain more. We gypsies have a saying, ‘Light wallet in the morning: heavy wallet at night.’ I am sure to be very rich this evening, for Moostan, our chief, said that we should go to the Café Precbraskenski this evening, and all the soldiers there have so much money from the Empress that they don’t know what to do with it. That rouble I had the other day came from one of them.”

It is a strange thing, but one never understands human nature, that Ivan did not at all like to hear of this rouble given by a soldier; nor did it at all delight him that Azra was to sing and dance at the Preobraskenski Café that night. Yet he was true—as true as men can ever be—to the one object of his devotion, the Princess Marie; and he would have resented it as an insult of the deepest kind if any one had ventured even to inquire why it was that he should have had any dislike to Azra’s going to

that café, where the soldiers were so generous and so kind, and withal so profuse in their admiration for pretty gypsy girls.

Ivan, with that grand power of self-deception which, perhaps, is the greatest source of our happiness, entirely declined to ask himself any question of that nature.

“I wish you would not go so often to that café, Azra,” he exclaimed, somewhat pettishly.

Azra must have been a very innocent girl, for not the faintest notion that anything like jealousy was beginning to arise in the dim depths of Ivan’s soul, entered at all into her mind.

“Oh!” she replied, “we sometimes get five times as much from that café as from anywhere else; and Moostan says—he is such a wise old man, and very good to me—that we should not get nearly so much if we went there too often. But I must go, dear, I can’t stay any longer, I was beaten the other day—but I didn’t mind it, for being late.” And so saying, she seized his pallid hand and kissed it. That did not mean

much in that time and amongst that people, for there was a constant kissing of hands on the part of inferiors to superiors. And then she moved quickly out of the room.

Ivan's thoughts, after she left, were very disconsolate. Even before the new Empress's accession to the throne, he had been ill-received by all his former friends and acquaintances whom he had solicited. Few, indeed, were those to whom he could appeal; for, as has been said before, most of his friends and relatives had been sent to Siberia. And now what chance had he, the only man who had really made any effort personally, to avert the successful revolution, of finding support or favour with any human being in St. Petersburg? As he pondered over these thoughts, a most daring project came into his mind. In the confusion that had occurred during that night, when the Princess Elizabeth seized upon the reins of empire, all rank and order had been disturbed. Many persons of the lower ranks, servants and others, had crowded into the hall of Elizabeth's Palace when the

Duchess Regent, her husband, the infant Emperor, and the other prisoners had been brought in.

The new Empress had never been accustomed to speak with "bated breath, or whispering humbleness;" and she was not likely to do so when she felt that she was supreme in Russia. She had, moreover, the loud clear voice of her father; and though what she had said on Ivan's being brought wounded into the Hall, was probably not meant by her to be overheard, it was as loudly uttered as a "stage aside;" and twelve or thirteen people, some of them of the lower class, heard every word of it. A version of the Empress's saying, not very accurate, but still not very far from the truth, was current in St. Petersburg. The gypsies, always eager for intelligence, learnt what had been said or was supposed to have been said, by the Empress; and Azra had not failed to repeat it to Ivan, thinking that it would be some comfort to him to hear it.

He said to himself "She and Azra are great

souls." He could not help smiling after he had said this to himself, at his daring to liken Azra to the Empress. "But they are alike; for they can both recognize and understand fidelity. I will write to her," meaning the Empress, "and will claim to be admitted into her service."

So he did write; and his letter was such a one as royal or imperial personages seldom receive. He told the Empress, who he was and the story of his life. He confessed that he had known of the conspiracy; and from motives of gratitude had told what he knew to Juliana de Mengden: that he had then done his best to prevent the success of the plot; and had received his wound at the door of the Duchess Regent's sleeping apartment.

He concluded his letter by saying that if the new Empress would forgive him (not that he regretted what he had done), would receive him into her favour, and give him any employment however humble, he would be true to her for the remainder of his life, and ready to die for her if an occasion required it.

It was a bold, noble letter, very characteristic of the man who had, even when serving the Duke of Courland, ventured at the risk of his life, to provide some solace for the unfortunate exiles to Siberia whom his inexorable master had sent thither with an unsparing hand.

Ivan was not naturally what may be called a very clever man, certainly not a man of any genius. He had learnt, it is true, a great deal as Biron's secretary; but the Duke, a good judge of character, had chosen him not for his ability, but on account of the singular honesty that he perceived in him. And Ivan, with many scruples and with much suffering, had been substantially a true servant to his master; though if the Duke had known that his secretary had ever sought to mitigate the sufferings of the Duke's many victims, it would have fared ill with that dependant. Whether Ivan were, or were not, a man of any great talent, certain it is that he had a great soul, and could carry his life in his hand, as the saying is; and that is what few men have nobleness enough to do.

He knew, as he penned this letter, that exile or death might not be an improbable consequence of it; but he dared the utmost extreme that fate could send him.

On the following morning he told Azra that he had written a petition to the new Empress. He did not venture to read it to her, or to tell her its exact purport, for he feared that her loving anxiety for him would make her perceive all the danger of such a missive, and prevent her from aiding him in getting it conveyed to its destination. The beautiful gypsy girl was well known at the palace, as throughout St. Petersburg, and was not without admirers in those sacred precincts. Very great personages might have failed to get any memorial conveyed directly into the hands of the Empress. Azra was not so powerless; and she succeeded in causing this letter of Ivan's to be brought at once into the hands of the greatest personage in Russia.

The Empress, never unobservant of masculine beauty and never disinclined to notice and to favour any greatness and devotion in a subject

was delighted with Ivan's letter; and read portions of it to her attendant ladies, who, seeing the bent of their mistress's mind, did not fail to encourage her in what they called her noble goodness to an enemy.

The result was that a most favourable answer was sent to Ivan; and, in a short time, he was appointed one of the *Dvoraini*, or Gentlemen of the Chamber, in the Empress's household. She regarded him with particular favour, and would sometime condescend to jest with him about the wound which had not exactly been received in her service; but which had spoken so potently for him. And Ivan, in the fervour of his new gratitude, would protest that he would die for her. Upon which the mirthful Empress would reply "We shall see: we shall see: and perhaps sooner than you expect, De Biron. Men are very apt to say that they will die for the ladies; but our poor experience has not led us to recognize a large amount of male mortality resulting from these masculine protestations."

There were those about Court, but courtiers

are sometimes malicious, who even prognosticated that Ivan would supplant the reigning favourite, so much beloved, as scandal said, though of low origin, by the accomplished and handsome Elizabeth.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER III.

A BALL AT THE WINTER PALACE—THE MEETING BETWEEN IVAN AND THE PRINCESS MARIE—AZRA SINGS, AND THE EMPRESS RECOUNTS THE STORY OF AZRA AND IVAN.

THERE was a grand ball at the Winter Palace. The new Empress was determined that her Court should equal, if not surpass, in splendour the Courts of the preceding reigns. As it has been said before, this splendour might be somewhat of a barbaric kind; but it was splendour. The entertainments provided were certainly somewhat incongruous. For instance, in

addition to the regular musicians who constituted the Empress's own band, there were stationed, in different parts of the hall, other musicians, chiefly singers, who were to fill up the interludes of dancing by national songs, these bands being dressed in costume. Azra the gypsy girl was there. Her talent was well known, at any rate by all the lower classes of St. Petersburg, and she had been chosen to form one of a party who had called themselves the "Minstrels of the Neva."

The other girls who sang in this band were dressed in the old Russian fashion ; but Azra, according to the immutable rules of her tribe, was not allowed to dress otherwise than in their peculiar costume. There had been much difficulty in reconciling the other members of the band to this difference of dress ; but the question was settled by a musical necessity.

There was a certain solo part of a song, which was to be sung at a late period of the evening, and which, with what was called the celebrated "Neva Chorus," was to be the *chef*

d'œuvre executed by the Minstrels of the Neva. Now there was no one who could sing this song so well as Azra, and therefore her presence was considered to be indispensable. Hers was a contralto voice, with all the pathos that belongs to that most touching and effective of human voices.

It might have been expected that the Empress Elizabeth would have some unpleasant reminiscences connected with any ball given at the Winter Palace, for it was on a similar occasion that she had exercised all her powers of deceit, and had succeeded in deluding the pliant and placable Grand Duchess into a state of abject security. But, amidst the duties and the splendour of a new and great position, any baseness that may have been used in attaining it, is easily forgotten. Moreover, the character of Elizabeth had rapidly developed under the pressure of Empire. Her mind dwelt not at all upon the past, but was full of social and political aims for the future.

This was the first great entertainment at

which she had an opportunity of receiving and welcoming those exiles from Siberia whom she had recalled.

Here and there, in the crowd, there must have been some courtiers, whose caution or whose happy mediocrity had preserved them intact amidst the frequent perilous changes in the official life of Russia at that period. They would know how various were the causes which had led to the exile of the high personages then present, and would appreciate the difficulty which the Empress would experience in her endeavour to reconcile them, and to show something like equal favour to all.

To create a general feeling of amity was her great object. She saw that the security of her reign depended upon her power of effacing ancient feuds amongst the nobility, and making it to be understood that, for the future, there were to be no parties in Russia, but that it was to be one sovereign with supreme power ruling over a united people. The Empress was fully impressed with the great ideas of her father,

to which he had often, no doubt, given utterance in her presence. And one of these main ideas was the internal development and civilization of the Empire.

Among the principal personages present, there were several who had to play strange parts that evening, and play them well; for, under the observant eyes of the Empress, great men had to welcome one another and to shake hands, who had done each other irreparable injuries. Passing, however, from them, we come to those who might be considered the minor actors, but who are, nevertheless, not without interest for us.

The Princess Marie Serbatoff was there. She had long imagined what she should do, and how she should comport herself, if she were ever to meet her old lover Ivan again. After his departure from Pelem, and while she was aiding and comforting his near relation, the Duke of Courland, she had often pictured to herself the meeting with him. Indeed, during her dreary, toilsome journey from Siberia to St. Petersburg,

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the thought of this meeting had filled her mind. Her father, observing her thoughtfulness, had frequently asked that question, which, perhaps, has never been truthfully answered since the world began, "What are you thinking of, my dear?" but had not obtained any other than the usual answer, "Nothing."

The same thought was now fully in her mind, though she had not the slightest expectation of seeing Ivan at any Imperial festivity. She deemed that though he had returned from exile and had been pardoned, he would still be in obscurity; and, moreover, it was to be noticed that the Duke of Courland himself was not present on this occasion. The politic Empress probably thought that, great as her power and influence might be in reconciling old enemies, that power and influence were not strong enough to admit of her bringing the Duke at once to Court; for his unwelcome presence would embitter so many statesmen who had suffered from his cruel decrees. Other Russian statesmen and ministers had, for the most part, injured only

a few families. These feuds were in the nature of private baronial wars. But the number the Duke had injured was legion; and, moreover, the misery he had caused was quite recent and fully in the minds of all men. He had, therefore, been stopped on his way to St. Petersburg; and his escort had received orders to convey him to Jaroslaw, where, for the present, he was to remain.

To return to the Princess Marie. She was a woman of a very original mind and disposition. With all that indignation strongly acting upon her, at what she most unjustly felt for Ivan's treachery, as she called it, in not having told her who he was, her love for him was still supreme—that kind of love which it is only given to the greatest souls to feel—immense, unswerving, unalterable, and possessing and pervading the whole existence of the loving person.

She was convinced that they never could be united. With her knowledge of her father, how could she hope that he would now—now

that he was likely to be powerful again—listen for a moment to the proposal of such a marriage; and with her love for her father, how could she make up her mind even to hint at such an alliance, which she felt would be a death blow to him?

How then should she meet Ivan, and in what manner should she treat him? It was in her resolve upon this point, that her originality of character manifested itself. She determined to be cold to him; but it should only be cold as a lover. It should be very warm as a friend. She would thank him for all his kindness to herself—for all the labour on behalf of herself and her family which he had shared. She would not fear to bring up every reminiscence of this kind, while she would studiously avoid any reference to the sweet and loving words which had passed between them. If he ventured to recall such passages, she would treat these reminiscences as the nonsense often talked between boys and girls, in which there could be no real and abiding meaning. She shud-

dered as she thought how real it was ; and how abiding, at least on her part, it ever would be. And then she smiled, thinking to herself that just thought of how much wiser and older young women are than young men, even when the latter have the apparent superiority of age, as was the case between her and her Ivan.

We have somewhat anticipated the events which happened at this great festival, or rather have indicated the spirit and the manner in which it was to be conducted by the greater personages, and by one of the minor persons.

The guests had all arrived. Punctuality is a virtue known at all Courts, and especially at those which are despotic. The Empress had not yet entered the ball-room. Soon there came a hurrying backwards and forwards of pages and chamberlains dressed in gorgeous costume. Then there was a buzz of expectation : then a respectful silence. The folding-doors were thrown open, and the Empress Elizabeth made her entrance, surrounded and followed by a

brilliant suite, amongst whom was her new member of the Household, Ivan de Biron.

The Princess Marie was not long in recognizing her lover, notwithstanding that his dress and appearance were not a little different from that coarsely-clad youth who had so often sat by her side in the forest encircling the town of Pelem.

She felt herself growing pale and cold. We may think beforehand as much as we like of any great scene we have to encounter ; but, when the reality comes, we seldom find that we are quite as well prepared for it, as we thought we were.

The Princess Marie, to a certain extent, recovered from her embarrassment by a droll thought—droll from its comical contrast of circumstances—which crossed her mind. She could not help remembering how certain she used to be at Pelem to find Ivan seated by her side in a few minutes after the clang of the horns had ceased, which were blown by the herdsmen announcing their return with their cattle to the town.

The flourish of trumpets which had announced an event of a very different kind, namely, the entrance of the Empress into the ball-room, had naturally brought back this pleasant reminiscence to the mind of the Princess. When in the wood at Pelem, she had often, with the playfulness of a girl, shut her eyes, and wrapt in seeming meditation, pretended not to be aware of Ivan's approach, treating it as a matter of great surprise, when he would reproachfully say to her "You must have known, Marie, that I should have been sure to come, for would I leave you to do all this hard work by yourself?"

She never felt more supremely fond of him than when she recalled, as she did at this moment, many meetings of theirs at the edge of the wood; and she thought, unconsciously imitating his Highness of Courland, "Would that we were all back again, so that I might have my Ivan to myself, and that those happy days, for so they were to me, could be renewed."

As soon as Ivan could quit his post of duty and mingle with the guests, he made his way to the

Princess Marie. He had known that she was to be there, and her presence was no surprise to him.

True to her plan of action, for the Princess was not one to falter in a great resolve, she received him as one receives, after long absence, a dear friend. They shook hands warmly. Even in that act of welcome though, he felt that there was something very different from that which had been always present in their meetings in the Siberian wood, now so dear to him, with all its fond recollections. She was the first to speak.

“I am so glad to see you, Ivan. I little thought to see you here, and to find you in high favour, and to what great office does this grand dress belong?”

“I am one of the minor members of the Household, Princess.”

“Somewhat different,” she, smiling, said, touching the gold lace upon his shoulder, “from the bear and wolf furs of our hard-working days in Siberia.”

“But you, Princess, are more yourself than

ever, now that you appear as becomes your rank, and not in the martens' fur, which I—”

“Yes, yes; we must not dwell too much upon those former times, Ivan. We now belong to a Court. We must forget the days of Cinderella. You know the old fairy story? How handsome the Empress looks! How proud you must be, Ivan, to serve such a mistress. I doubt not you are in high favour. They do say she likes to have good-looking youths about her.”

Ivan felt his heart sink, for he fully understood the meaning of these playful words, and how the Princess sought by ordinary talk of this kind, to keep him at a distance, and to mark the change which had taken place in their respective positions. What was meant by the word ‘youths’ was not lost upon him. Oh yes: it was all to be made out to be mere boy-and-girl play—entirely juvenile! He was right in his conjecture.

“But Marie, dearest Marie, have you quite forgotten—”

“Forgotten, no: I am blest with my father’s power of memory. I remember everything, even to the foolish sayings of a boy and girl in distant regions. But certainly it is wise, if not pleasant, Ivan, to forget sometimes: and we will not tax our memory too much in recalling what a boy and girl may have said to one another—in their days of childhood, shall we call it?”

“Bid me forget anything but that, Princess.”

She laid her hand timidly, but yet affectionately, upon his arm; and said with a voice that trembled as she spoke, “But we will always be friends, the dearest of friends, Ivan. My father is in favour again. See, the Empress is now speaking to him. Can we do anything for you? I am sure my father—”

Ivan, with all his gentleness, was a proud man, and he felt hurt and humiliated to the very uttermost.

“Your father can do nothing, Princess,” he haughtily replied.

“I should have been glad,” he added, “to have had the honour of dancing with the Prin-

cess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff; but shall not presume upon our old acquaintanceship in Siberia; and no doubt there are others in the room more fitting to aspire to her hand in the dance than a mere servitor in the Palace. I see that the Empress is moving onwards, and I had better follow, as my duty is, in Her Majesty's suite."

So saying, and with a profound bow, Ivan parted from the Princess, carrying with him as sorrow-stricken a heart as was perhaps to be found in that great assemblage, where there were many hearts not at all attuned to the festivity of the proceedings.

Meanwhile, there was one person in the ball-room who had not been an indifferent spectator to this meeting between the two lovers: who, indeed, had marked every change of look and gesture that had passed between them. This was the gypsy girl, Azra. It happened that the band of singers to which she belonged, had been placed close to the very spot in which the two lovers had met; and, coming slightly forward

from her circle, Azra had been enabled to watch the lovers closely. Ivan had not seen her; and, until it had come to her turn to sing, he had been oblivious of her presence.

When, late in the evening, she did sing, all eyes were attracted to her. Nature had gifted her with greater powers of song than those possessed by any other person then present. The great singers of the opera at St. Petersburg did not deign to enter these groups, as it would have been quite beneath their dignity to sing the National songs which were in vogue on that occasion.

The Empress herself, a fine judge of musical talent, returned with all her suite to that part of the room where Azra was singing, and listened with pleased attention.

It is not a fancy of courtiers, but is a decided fact, that the members of Imperial and Royal families have a wonderful power of remembering people. It is part of their kingly craft, and one which they almost always succeed in fulfilling. The Empress had not heard three bars of the

song, before she at once recognized the singer; and, after the song had ended, she recounted to the circle of courtiers that surrounded her, the story of Ivan's having been wounded, and of this gypsy girl having come forward and claimed, as a sister, to take care of the wounded man.

The Princess Marie had, on Ivan's quitting her, made her way to her father, sure to be found not far from his imperial mistress; and Marie had listened attentively to the clear tones of the Empress, while she narrated this interesting story of sisterly affection.

Elizabeth, with that sense of humour, which nothing could restrain, called Ivan towards her, and said "You see, my Lords, that for once we have promoted a gypsy to a place in our Household. We should not have discovered, from his looks, his birth and parentage; and we did rather think that he was more closely allied to the puissant House of Courland than to the gypsy tribe, of which that girl is such an ornament. But, my good Ivan," addressing herself to him, "there is no occasion for blushing so

vividly. You may well be proud of your sister. Be good enough to convey to her, with this jewel, (and here she carelessly tore a ruby pendant from her dress) our acknowledgment of the pleasure she has given us."

Ivan went to Azra and conveyed the Empress's message. Shyly he then drew back, amidst the smiles of the surrounding courtiers.

There were many persons who did not return in a joyous frame of mind from that ball that night. Amongst them might be counted the discomfited lover Ivan, the gypsy Azra, and the Princess Marie, who, to her other sufferings, had now the added pangs of an apparently well-founded jealousy.

"His sister, indeed! It is a sister that I never heard of before."

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER IV.

THE HOPES AND PROJECTS OF THE PRINCESS MARIE—
AZRA AND IVAN DESCRIBED—AZRA'S INTERVIEW
WITH THE PRINCESS.

It is not a new thing to say, that a great struggle in any one human heart, could one pourtray it adequately, would be far more interesting than any description of battles, sieges and revolutions, great and important as their results might be.

There were certainly three persons who left the Winter Palace, after that night of festivity, in anything but a happy mood. Their feelings, however, were very different.

Ivan was shocked and depressed. He could not realize to himself that the Princess could be in earnest in repelling him, and that she could so completely have forgotten, or resolved to ignore, her former promises. He knew her waywardness, and attributed her conduct to any cause but that of falseness to her lover. His course was clear before him. He would seek for some opportunity of ascertaining what her feelings towards him really were; and he found comfort in thinking, that it was in accordance with her proud and undemonstrative nature, not to manifest in public any signs of great joy on seeing him for the first time again. Still her words had been very significant, and when he recalled them, hope almost fled from his heart.

Azra's feelings were undisturbed by perplexity. They were, nevertheless, very bitter. She had not failed to notice the cold and distant manner in which the Princess had received her Ivan; but she had now no doubt whatever how sincere was his attachment, and she was

not comforted by perceiving how worthy of his love, at any rate in outward appearance, was the object of that love.

With the Princess, the state of feeling was very different. Her mind was the prey of contending impulses. She was not going to marry Ivan. That was a decided conclusion. Why then was she made miserable by the recollection of the Empress's story?

“So then, it was that singing girl, who had claimed to have the wounded Ivan given to her care—a righteous claim—a proper claim! Oh, no doubt, a sister's!” This was the bitter soliloquy of the Princess. It was in vain that she repeated to herself the fatal objections to her union with Ivan—the difference of rank—the family feuds not healed, only the outward manifestation of them subdued—the especial enmity her father bore to all the House of Biron. The Duke of Courland was as hateful as ever to those whom, in the days of his supremacy, he had wronged and persecuted. Her father, the Princess said

to herself again and again, would die rather than consent to her marriage with any one of that hated family, even if he were rich and powerful and not merely an obscure member of the Imperial Household.

Still, again and again, these wise reflections were interrupted and controlled by the one thought of that gypsy girl having assumed to herself the care of Ivan during his illness. "How had she become known to him? How, if not known and well-known, if indeed they were not old friends, or something dearer than that, had Ivan endured this familiarity?"

On the day after the Court ball, Azra had, on some pretext, gone to Ivan's lodgings, and had seen him. He was kind and courteous as ever. His expressions of gratitude were warmer than ever; but the fond girl could not help observing that he was not particularly anxious to protract her stay with him.

Another day had passed; and the Princess was still wearily reiterating the thoughts

which had never been absent from her mind since her return from the Palace, when it was announced to her that a young woman wished to speak to her. She asked her attendant if she knew who it was. To which there came the reply that Stepan, the page, said he was sure it was the young gypsy girl who sings so well in the streets. "Admit her instantly," exclaimed the Princess; and Azra entered.

For a minute or two the young women looked at each other in silence. Each felt with some pain how beautiful the other was, and yet, they could not but admire each other. This was not their first time of looking earnestly at one another; but it so happened that they were both of that rare order of beauty which shows its best in simple costume. It had been the pride of Azra's tribe to bedizen her with tawdry ornaments on any occasion of her singing in public, which ornaments, reluctantly worn by the girl, had been in ludicrously bad taste.

And as for the Princess, her somewhat severe and yet singular beauty of feature and of expression, had perhaps never been so becomingly adorned as when she wore the simple dress of a Siberian peasant, and had enchanted the heart of Ivan.

The contrast in the demeanour of the two young women was very great. All that Azra had prepared to say, had gone out of her mind; and she looked the very picture of embarrassment, as she plucked nervously at the tassels of her Kaftan. The Princess, from her earliest years, had lived with great people, and had acquired the best manners of a Court. She was, if one might use the expression, a girl of the world. She, therefore, was perfectly self-possessed.

“What is it that you want with me?” she said, “I do not even know your name?”

“Azra, Madam.”

“And what is it you want?”

“Nothing for myself, Madam; but Ivan is so miserable. I am sure if you knew—”

The Princess's look of astonishment stopped Azra in the middle of her sentence.

“And who is your Ivan?—and in what way can I be of any service to you or to him?”

“Ivan de Biron, Madam. The same who was with you in Siberia; but perhaps your Excellency did not know him by that name?”

“I do remember him. He was with us in Siberia, and very kind and serviceable he was to all our household. We are all most grateful; and I am sure my father would do anything to serve him. Is he in distress? I should not think so, if I might judge from his appearance, when I last saw him.”

These answers of the Princess roused the indignation of the faithful Azra, and at once deprived her of either fear, or shame, in regard to what she meant to say.

“No: he is not in distress, except what your ingratitude and unkindness have brought upon him. You know him well, Princess, and you know he loves you; and I know that when he was in the fever, your name

was always on his lips ; and it did seem as if it had a right to be there. I came to speak up for him, and I am his only friend in St. Petersburg, except the Empress who has been so good to him."

The Princess only smiled at the vehemence of Azra ; but she resolved to ascertain the relations between Azra and Ivan : so she said,

"And pray, if I may make the inquiry, how long have you been acquainted with this young man ? And how is it that he was entrusted to your care ? I think you informed the Empress that he was your brother ?"

Then Azra told her tale: how, at first, from mere good-nature, pitying his forlorn condition, she had given him information which might restore him to fortune—what use he made of this knowledge—how he had been wounded—what the Empress had said; and, in short, all that had happened, as far as she knew, to Ivan since his return to St. Petersburg.

The only reply of the Princess was " And what has the pity become ? Do you love him ? "

Azra was not prepared for this direct question. She hung down her head, looked abashed, and felt that, even through her dark colour, the deepest of blushes was visible in her face. But the nimble wit of the gypsy girl did not for long desert her. She raised her head; and, looking full at the Princess, said, with a gentle voice, "And you, Madam?"

It was now the Princess's turn to feel embarrassed, but her more worldly self-command prevented her from betraying her feelings as openly as Azra had done. She, also, with some gentleness, replied. "You saw us, Azra, at the ball. I doubt not that you marked us well. I leave it to your insight, versed as you tell me you and your tribe are in unravelling State secrets and those of the witlings who believe in you, to say, with what feelings, I received your Ivan. And the youth is very dear to me—dear as the best of true friends, and as the kindest help-mate in our trouble. I never had a brother, but—"

It was fortunate for the Princess (for Azra would not have been satisfied with this dubious,

though skilful reply) that the Prince, her father, entered the room at this juncture. She lost not a moment in explaining to her father who Azra was. "The singer, dear father, whom you so much admired the other evening. You are wont to be satisfied with your Marie's singing; but I could learn much from her."

"Well, my dear," said the Prince, "I must confess I like to listen to you better than to any other human being, whether you speak or sing; but perhaps you might improve to other ears by practising with this young woman. You would improve her, too."

The Prince was a kind-hearted gentleman; and, now that he had returned to his proper element, the Court, he was in high good humour. Neither was he insensible to the remarkable loveliness of the gypsy girl, and was pleased to patronize her.

"And this, dear Marie, is the same young woman who was so kind to that friend of ours in Siberia, so at least we heard from our gracious sovereign. That young man will rise at Court,

my dear, I can plainly see that. It's a pity he has that hateful name. Is he a relative? I dare say it's a common name in Courland. There must be many people there with the same name as its low-born Duke."

The Princess made no reply to her father's question.

Meanwhile the good gentleman fumbled in his pockets, and produced some gold coins, which, with an affectation of secrecy he placed in Azra's hands; and then, mentioning to his daughter that she was to accompany him in a formal visit that he was to pay to the Empress in the course of that afternoon, he bowed respectfully to both the young women, and saying that he should hope to be allowed sometimes to assist at their singing lessons, the veteran courtier retired.

The Princess and Azra, when left alone, looked at one another, and then burst into an immoderate fit of laughter. There was no part of the remarkable character of the Princess which was more predominant than her sense of the ridiculous. Her love of wit and humour had

often cheered and encouraged Ivan, who had but little of it in his own somewhat stern and steadfast character, when they were employed together in household duties in Siberia.

It pleased and amused the fancy of the Princess, that her father should have supposed the two girls to have been brought together, notwithstanding their difference in rank, by the attraction of musical skill and knowledge, when, in fact, it had been to both of them one of the most dread moments of their lives : a crisis alike to the Princess and the gypsy girl ; for Azra felt that the Princess had not succeeded in concealing from her that she, too, devotedly loved her Ivan.

After the laughter had subsided, the Princess was the first to take a decided step. She moved forwards to Azra ; and kissed her first on one cheek and then on the other, as was the Russian fashion.

Upon this Azra knelt and kissed her hand, saying, " My little mother, how good of you, for you know I am only a gypsy girl, and I ought

not to have come to you ; but it was for his sake.”

The Princess, fearing any further questioning, said “ But now Azra you must go, for I must get ready to accompany my father ; ” and, so saying, she led her to the door, and kissing her again, dismissed her.

Her last words were “ But we will see one another again. They shall have orders always to admit you.”

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER V.

IVAN'S AMBITION—MAINTAINS HIS INTIMACY WITH
AZRA—WHO LEARNS TO WRITE.

IF there are superior beings, and perhaps there are, who, unseen, regard us and our doings, what must they think when looking over some vast library? What would they say to one another? It might be something of this kind: "Consider the subjects of their books. Look at the hundreds of thousands about religion, money, or love—not about the essential aspects of religion, but treating of mysteries which their poor understandings are utterly unable to com-

prehend. For the rest, there are a good many of these tomes which tell of their foolish quarrels, and there is a sprinkling, not equal in weight to the dust on the other volumes, of works treating of those things which it most concerns them to know; for they cannot build a dwelling fit even for such poor creatures to live in. In cities, they are not as skilful as the insects which are given them as examples; and they do but waste those materials which are given for their solace."

Without caring to answer what might thus be said, touching the numberless volumes devoted to religion, money, or war, we might make some defence for the numerous volumes devoted to love. It is not only from its infinite interest, but from its infinite variety, that this subject has justly demanded so many volumes to be devoted to itself.

Probably there is no instance in which any two lovers have made love exactly in the same way as any two other lovers, since the world began.

To the bystander, too, there is this especial

interest in the matter, that it is the beginning of a career of comparative unselfishness. It is when in love that a human being, perhaps for the first time in life, finds that another human being is dearer to him or to her, than his or her own self.

Hence we leave, without regret, for the moment, the thorny paths of Russian history, to pursue the bye-ways of private life, as shown in the loves of the Princess Marie, Azra, and Ivan.

After quitting the ball, it had been Ivan's settled resolve to demand some fuller explanation from the Princess Marie of her conduct towards him; and he had said to himself that he would do so the next day.

But he did not do so the next day, neither had he done so at the time when this chapter takes up the story. He had, at first, comforted himself, as has been stated, by the reflection that the Princess was a proud girl, and would be anxious not to show, on their first meeting at the Court of Russia, in the presence of so many

curious eyes, what her real feelings were. Further thought almost proved to him that such coldness, as she had shown, could not be attributed to this cause. There was the marked intention of receiving him as one who had been a kind and obliging friend, while entirely ignoring the existence of any other feeling than that of friendship towards him. He would not go near her now. He would distinguish himself in some way. He would find, or make, a new career; but it should not be as a mere servitor of the Palace, that he would approach her. While he was in that condition, he would keep himself far away from her presence. When she came to Court, as come she would, he would not cease from the closest attendance upon his Imperial Mistress, and would never deviate into the crowd.

By what means should he distinguish himself from the common herd? His early training and his later experience had made him think that the surest mode of rising to power and influence in Russia would be to gain political knowledge of

all kinds—to find out, and to be able to tell the new Empress, what were the feelings of the populace towards her—to discover, on their first existence, conspiracies, if any such should be formed,—and, in fact, to make himself a trusted supporter of the new order of things, rather than a mere appendage to the imperial household.

With this view, what was more necessary, what could be more useful, than to maintain his present relations with Azra? It had always been known to the Duke of Courland, and therefore to his private Secretary, how much information that might be useful to the government, was possessed by these wandering tribes of gypsies. It was not without intention, though hardly confessed to himself, that the Duke, on that eventful evening which preceded the last day of his regency, had condescended to have his fortune told, for the chance of hearing something which, to his apprehensive mind, might convey political intelligence.

Moreover, Ivan had recently learnt to appreciate the gypsy knowledge of coming events,

(not altogether of a prophetic character,) from the information which Azra had, from day to day, given him during the last few weeks of the Duchess Regent's tenure of power.

Thus Ivan reasoned with himself, not telling himself, however confidentially, that dearer, perhaps, than the hope of getting any political information, was the longing to retain the sympathy of Azra in the great trouble that beset him. Then, too, it naturally followed that it was very desirable, as he said to himself, that Azra should be taught to write, in order that information might be promptly conveyed to him, when he could not receive it in person.

Thus there was scarcely a day in which Azra did not come to see her friend; and, as he might now be called, her instructor. She had never told him that she had been to see the Princess Marie. This concealment was founded upon no motive of self-seeking, or of jealousy; but she feared, in his present state of feeling towards the Princess, to tell him what she had done; and she also feared that, in his anger at what he would

conceive to have been a step derogatory to him, even though he had not prompted it, she would be dismissed for her interference, and would not be allowed to see him again. Poor child, for almost "child" she was, except for the grown-up gypsy cunning which had been impressed upon her by the elders of her tribe, she had made up her mind, or rather we may say her heart, to devote herself to the reconciliation of the lovers.

The first barrier had for some time been broken down which had prevented Ivan, according to the natural reticence of a lover, from talking to another person of his love. It was now a subject which far more frequently occupied the talk of Ivan with Azra, than did the rumours of latent conspiracies, or the pressing cares of tuition.

Previously to the commencement of a conversation about to be narrated, between Ivan and the gypsy girl, she had received a short lesson in writing. Ivan, absorbed as he was in the profound love he felt for the Princess Marie,—

feeling, as regards all other women, (so, at least, he always told himself) that they were but mere images, or at best, pale reflections of her,—still could not help noticing how very graceful Azra was, even when engaged in this ungainly task of learning to write. He thought of his young sisters far away in Courland, whom he loved very much. He had seen them taught to write and to draw, and remembered how he had joked with them about their awkward gestures, and their mode of sitting at the table, while they were being taught. There was that flexible grace about whatever Azra did, which absolutely forbade her being awkward on any occasion.

Ivan, indeed, was wont to say to himself that Azra was as graceful as a fish—an odd simile ; but one, the general idea of which had often occurred to him during those listless, unhappy hours of exile, when he would stand upon one of the bridges of the Tavda, and, in its clear waters, follow the movements of those creatures, which are perhaps the most graceful in the world,

though their grace has, hitherto, been scarcely recognized, even by poets.

At a pause in the lesson, Azra had mentioned the name of the Princess Marie, saying how she had seen her, with her father, going to a great party, and how sad she looked.

“I tell you, Azra, she behaved cruelly, wickedly, worse than wickedly, ungratefully, to me.”

“Perhaps, my little father, you do not quite understand the ways of women.”

“Oh yes; when people behave very wickedly, one always hears that one does not understand them. If one were to be half-devoured by wolves, and were to make any objection to the proceeding, I suppose it would be said by other wolves, that one did not understand the kind intentions of their brethren. Now, do not make these foolish excuses, Azra. You women cling together, and always justify one another.”

“I did not know that it was so. It isn't so in our tribe. Machetta is always saying unkind things of me, and follows me about like a

watch-dog ; and I don't love her, I can tell you."

"Perhaps," said Ivan, not caring to answer Azra's remark, "that pompous fool, her princely father, has something to do with it. He thinks he is going to be a great man again at Court. He was glad enough to have me as a serf, when we were in Siberia—and, for the matter of that, I was glad enough to be that serf. But that's all over now."

It may be remembered that the Prince, a most courteous gentleman, had been very gracious to Azra, when he found her in his daughter's apartment ; so Azra, with her honest nature, could not but speak in his favour.

"He is a very good and kind man, Ivan, and would not harm anybody."

"How should you know anything about him, Azra ? "

Azra felt her blood mount to her face, perceiving how near she had been to betraying the fact of her visit to the Princess ; but Ivan did not notice her confusion, as she replied :

“Oh we gypsies know something about most of your great men ; and he never gives less than three roubles when we sing before his palace.”

“When he orders, as I have no doubt he has ordered, that I shall not be admitted there,” replied Ivan, “I might suppose that it was ungrateful on his part ; but it would, of course, only be that I do not understand his peculiar princely mode of expressing gratitude. And his daughter is—a worthy daughter of such a father.”

While the conversation had thus proceeded, Azra had risen from her chair, and was, almost unconsciously, practising the first steps of that most exquisite of dances, the Spanish bolero, as frequently and as well danced in Russia, at that period, as in Spain.

She ceased to dance. Advancing towards Ivan, she held up her finger in the impressive manner that she had copied from the elder women of her tribe, and thus addressed him. “Listen, my little father, to a story which I will tell you—a true story, which our good chief

often tells us, when we sit round the fire at night, out in the woods. We are not always here, you know : we like the woods near Moscow better, where the sun is warm sometimes.

“There was once a gypsy, not of our tribe—a bad man—oh so bad, so very bad. He never did what the chief told him to do, and when he got anything, he kept it to himself, and would not share it with others, and was not hungry when they were hungry, and laughed when they were sad, and made friends with the Starosts of the villages, and told wicked lies about his tribe to them, and they gave him as much vodki as he could drink. And this bad man, one day, found a large bag of gold in a hole at the root of a great tree—oh, so large, so large, that he could hardly carry the bag ; but he stole away with it into Moscow and dressed himself as a great Lord, and bought serfs, and lived in a house with windows to it.

“But he was very miserable. You should hear our chief tell how miserable he was. And the disease of the rich man came upon him, and

he could not sleep in his palace at nights, and he was too proud, now that he was a great lord, to come out into the big forest and sleep like a good gypsy. And he died of the rich man's disease, and the gypsies would not bury him with the sacred songs, for he was a very bad gypsy."

Ivan could not help smiling, as he did not fail to perceive what was the moral of this story, as told by the lips of a gypsy chief—signifying what evil must come to a gypsy who did not share his good luck with his fellows.

He merely said "It is a very pretty story, Azra, and doubtless quite true ; but I do not see why you tell it me now, or what particular comfort it should give me."

"Ah, you would not wait," she said. "You are too impatient. Listen, listen," she said again, holding up her finger, in the same impressive manner which she had used before. "This is what our chief always says, after he has told us this story. 'My children these great gifts are from the Bad Spirit ; and the promises

which his red gold holds out, are as false as the first words of a young girl when her lover, whom she loves, asks her whether she loves him.'

"And then all our young men laugh, and they sing in chorus:

They say not what they mean, and they mean not what
they say,
For when they say "No," it does not mean nay,
And when they say "Go," it means you must stay.

Ivan laughed heartily, but was not much consoled by this gypsy refrain, thinking that there was but little resemblance between the nature and the ways of gypsy girls, and those of the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCESS MARIE STUDIES MUSIC WITH AZRA—THE
DESIGN OF THE PRINCESS FOR THE GOOD OF IVAN.

MEANWHILE, the Princess Marie seemed to have abandoned all thoughts of love, and to be solely devoting herself to the cultivation of music. The first master in St. Petersburg, Herr Schmälder, was in constant attendance upon her; and she contrived that Azra should frequently be present when his lessons were given. Occasionally, too, it was found to be desirable that Azra should take a part; and the Princess listened with delight, when the

master dwelt with pleasure upon the rich and wonderful voice of Azra, which, as he said, with the honesty belonging to great artists, only wanted the cultivation which the Princess possessed, to become superior to hers, and, indeed, to be one of the most notable in Europe.

The Princess must have made a great conquest of Azra's affections; for she succeeded in persuading her to adopt another kind of costume than that which gypsies held to be something sacred to them. A change of dress was always kept at the Serbatoff Palace; and Azra appeared at these lessons as a young friend of the Princess's.

The Prince himself was, also, often present, and welcomed Azra as if she had been one of the family. Not unskilled in diplomatic craft, he was but a poor observer of all that went on in his own household. Otherwise, if he had cared to study the characters of those who were not official or diplomatic persons, he would have been greatly amused and interested by the singular contrast which these two young women

presented. Azra's character was one of the simplest that can be imagined. She was an adept in gypsy arts: she knew how to ferret out that information which was so useful to her tribe; but she herself remained a creature of utter simplicity.

The same phenomenon may be observed throughout mankind. There are even statesmen, and what are called men of the world, who never lose this original and almost indestructible quality of mind—simplicity. The world is not slow to appreciate the fact; and, in estimating the characters of those who come most before it, is wont to bestow much favour upon those notable persons who possess this enviable simplicity, and its almost invariable accompaniment, singleness of purpose.

The Princess Marie, on the contrary, was a person of great complexity of nature, much given to introspection, and to diversity of plan and purpose. What was at present uppermost in her thoughts, was to do something which should be very grand and noble, to make an

immense self-sacrifice, and thus, at the cost of her own happiness, to ensure the welfare of the man whom she tenderly and truly loved.

Having this in view, she resolved that Azra should be made a worthy wife for Ivan. She had noticed when Azra sang the solo at the ball given at the Winter Palace, what great musical powers the girl possessed, and what effect had been produced upon that critical audience.

This was a sufficient basis for the Princess to construct her plan upon. Azra was to become a great singer; and, by cultivation of various kinds, was to be made in every respect worthy of Ivan's love. That love was to be transferred from the Princess to the gypsy girl. This, of course, was an easy part of the project in the mind of the scheming Princess.

So subtly are we formed, that minor parts of our character often make, or mar, our greatest resolves. The Princess was exceedingly fond of management. Even during her earliest years, the serfs on her father's estate had found out, with that knowledge of the character of their

superiors which serfdom or slavery always brings, that to ensure a compliance with any petition they might make to the Prince, it was very requisite to gain the concurrence of the little Princess, Marie Andréevna. That gained, there was almost a certainty of success. Her sojourn in Siberia, when she had been the chief stay and support of the household, had not weakened her power, or made her less fond of laying down plans for managing other people. Over Ivan she had ruled imperiously. Not that he was otherwise than a person of very strong and decided character; but men in love are apt to be very malleable; and Ivan often smiled to himself as he perceived how dexterously the Princess endeavoured to manage him, and how skilfully he contrived that she should have her way. Perhaps she would have been fonder of him, but this he little thought, if he had shown more plainly the real sternness and resoluteness of his nature.

One of the many lessons of music at which Azra was allowed to assist, had concluded. Herr Schmälder, during this lesson, had been

especially loud in praise of the quality of voice which the Princess's "little friend" possessed. He had said "what a happy man he should be, if any of his daughters had such a voice, and were capable of being taught how to use it."

It has always been a question whether the enjoyment of an art is increased, or lessened, by much knowledge of it—whether, for instance, the comparatively ignorant bystander, if his soul be musical, may not have a keener, if not a more profound, enjoyment even of a masterpiece of music than any of those who can, with adequate skill, bring it into life-like execution. However this nice question may be determined for the generality of persons, it certainly would have been difficult to find any human being who was more transported by music than this gypsy girl, whose knowledge, as yet, of music, was of the rudest kind.

But music, for her, transfigured all she saw. While listening to such an artist as the Princess, Azra was carried away, as it were, into regions of thought and feeling, which, at other

times, were very remote indeed from her. Like most uncultivated people, both her thoughts and her talk were confined to subjects of which she had practical knowledge—to those things which she had seen and heard, and to simple deductions from the humblest experiences. It was rarely that she deviated into any remark of a general or abstract nature.

When speaking, however, of music, she became not only eloquent, but imaginative, and, we may almost say, prophetic.

She would tell the Princess, who listened to her with astonishment, that music was in its infancy. “A time will come, dear Princess, when it will conquer all the nasty bad things in the world. There will be no knout, no cutting off of heads. You will all love even us poor gypsies; and the good Heaven, our dear old chief tells us of, will be on earth for us, for you, for everybody. Oh yes, it will. I can foresee it.”

The Princess, smiling, would ask whether this fortunate “everybody” would be sure to love the

every other right body who could respond to its love?"

"Yes, yes," Azra would reply, with a sigh. "It would be all right then. No. I do not know. No it won't. All people will love you, Princess, because you sing so beautifully."

"Then, my dear Azra, there will still be some unhappy people in the world, for I cannot love everybody in return, you know."

Then the two girls would laugh, and Azra would come down from her poetic flights, and talk in her usual childish fashion, of the most trifling things that she had seen or heard that day.

Returning to what took place after the music lesson which had just been concluded, Herr Schmälder had scarcely left the room, when the Princess began to talk with Azra in a strain of unusual earnestness.

"My dear Azra," she said, "you hear what Schmälder says. It is too absurd that you should not make use of a gift which God has given you so liberally."

"I do, I do," replied Azra, "I am only afraid that Lenchen and Machetta will hate me more than they do, because our chief will make me sing at the feasts of you great people."

"But the world, the whole world, my dear Azra, might be made to listen to you. The Prima Donna of St. Petersburg is nothing compared to you, if you did but know how to manage that sweet voice of yours. You hear, I say, what Schmälder says, and he is no flatterer: he does not pretend that I am your equal, only that I know better what to do with my inferior voice."

"Oh, it is beautiful," exclaimed Azra. "I feel as if I were not in this world when you sing, dearest Princess."

The Princess looked full in Azra's face. If there was anything in this world she detested, it was flattery; but she saw that Azra's words were from the heart, and she smiled to herself as she thought how disproportionate an effect her mere skill in singing could produce upon this comparatively untutored child. She thought, too, with somewhat of vanity, how both

these "children" (so she was pleased to name them in her thoughts,) Azra and Ivan were in her hands, and how she could mould them, exactly as she pleased, to suit her own purposes.

"Ivan de Biron," she said in a careless manner, "was always very fond of singing. He used to be greatly pleased with my poor attempts; for poor I declare they are, my little one, when compared with yours."

Azra now thought that she had an opportunity of saying a good word for Ivan. Though she had become attached to the Princess, it was the hope of advocating Ivan's cause that had been Azra's first motive in coming to the palace of the Serbatoffs; and she resolved to be true to her original intention.

"Oh! Princess," she said, "if I might but tell you:—if you would but listen to me, when I say how much he loves you. We gypsy girls don't understand you great ladies. Ah me, if I had such a lover, and if I were a Princess, I would go away with him and be his, though he were only a poor gypsy youth."

“No doubt you would, my dear Azra. But we have a saying borrowed from the French, from whom we borrow most things, and it says *Noblesse oblige*. Translated into Russian, dear, it means that there can never be anything between your Ivan and the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff.”

“Your Ivan! He is not mine, dear Princess. No loving thought of his ever wanders to me. I am as a serf to him, his and yours—sometimes useful to him, sometimes pleasing to him, but never loved. Ivan has but one love, and that is wholly given away. Oh that you could return his love, I should then be so happy.”

The Princess smiled again, “So happy, Azra, is that quite truthful?”

Azra answered truthfully, or at least believed that she did so, when she replied. “Yes, it would be the greatest happiness in my life.”

“What should you say, Azra, if we were to ask him some day to come and join us at our lessons? Do you think he would come?”

“Yes, he would. I know he would, even if

we were at that Pelem, and he was in the big town of France where the king lives. I know he would."

"Then he shall come; and you shall invite him, Azra."

After this permission had been given, Azra took her departure, and hastened to announce the good news to Ivan.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER VII.

A MUSIC-LESSON AT THE SERBATOFF PALACE.

THE joy of Ivan was unbounded when Azra brought him the invitation to be present at the next music-lesson. From the depths of despair he was raised to the heights of hope. His first thought then, as he said to himself, was the true and the right one,—that before others, in a crowded ball-room, she was designedly and studiously cold; but that now their old intimacy was to be renewed.

How slowly the minutes sped for him, and how he hated the sluggish march of time during

the three days that had to elapse before the next singing lesson at the Serbatoff Palace! He reckoned the number of those minutes, and told them off as they passed away, as children at school do when the holidays are almost in sight.

These same minutes passed but slowly too for the Princess Marie. Her soul was vexed by irreconcilable emotions; and when there is much and various thought, time passes but slowly: days may appear to extend into months of life. The resolute woman was not always resolved: her thoughts wavered to and fro, now spell-bound by love, now governed by what she held to be the dictates of common sense, strengthened by her determined idea of self-sacrifice. Finally her first determination prevailed. She could not, and she would not, be his.

A woman can express much of her mind by her mode of dress, which often speaks a language unknown to the other sex. The Princess dressed herself for this lesson, with great care, and with a richness not very suitable to the

occasion. But she desired as much as possible to dissociate the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff, so far as change of dress could effect the object, from her former peasant self, and so to signify to Ivan the change that he was to believe had taken place in her mind. What had been intimated in the ball-room was now to be confirmed. There was to be a complete effacement of those times when they were wont to sit side by side together in the forest of Pelem; when the contention was on her part to be allowed to do her share of the hard work; and when, too, as she blushed to think, very loving tokens of regard had, once or twice at least, been exchanged between them.

Azra came early to attend the music-lesson. The Princess had taken care not to be alone when Ivan should arrive. She need not have taken this precaution; for Ivan, proud as herself, would not anticipate the hour of their meeting: and when he did arrive, Herr Schmälder was in the room which, shortly afterwards, Prince Serbatoff entered.

Meanwhile the Princess welcomed Ivan to her boudoir. And how did she receive him? As before, with the perfection of friendliness, but with refined and nice discretion. There is even something different between the welcome a girl gives to her brother, or her much-regarded cousin, and that which she bestows upon a much liked friend (not a lover) of her own age—perhaps her brother's friend. The warmest of such friendly welcomes was given to Ivan. In all ages, even when people talk most loudly of the decline of the Drama, there are still good actors on the stage; but, in all ages, the best, the most consummate acting, has been off the stage.

The lesson commenced. The principal personage was to be the Princess, and she did not dwarf her part. She sang well: indeed she sang her best. She did not condescend to little arts; and, moreover, she was aware that Ivan knew well what her musical powers were. At the same time she knew how far, as regards the natural gifts for song, Azra surpassed her. She

knew, too, how the approval of others enhances, and often indeed reveals the merits of those whose excellence we have before but carelessly, if at all, observed. She meant that Ivan should fully understand and appreciate the great gifts of Azra as a songstress.

Even as regards dress, she had been as careful for Azra as she had been for herself; and it had been a pretty and touching sight, which presented itself in the half-hour before Ivan arrived, while the loving woman (almost unconsciously we speak of the Princess as a woman, and of Azra as a girl), was seeking to make her young rival appear to the utmost possible advantage.

The Princess, as it has been said, sang well. It must have been better than usual, for she received warm praise from Herr Schmälder, a cold man, very little given to praise, and utterly indifferent to the rank or station of his pupils. Indeed, Herr Schmälder would not have honoured the greatest lady in St. Petersburg, hardly even the Empress herself, by his teaching, if he had perceived no germs of talent in her. He *had*

been the singing-master of the Empress; and certain rude speeches of his to his Imperial pupil were well known at Court.

“Upon my word it was excellent,” he exclaimed, “I am very proud of you, Princess (he had never said that to her before), and I am sure the Prince must be so, too.”

The Princess began to fear, lest, in her desire to be true to her part, she had gone beyond it, and she felt somewhat anxious as to whether Azra would fulfil her expectations.

Azra was now invited, and indeed pressed, to sing. Herr Schmälder, not understanding any of the bye-play that was being enacted before him, was astonished at Azra’s reluctance. The gypsy girl had hitherto been utterly free from any bashfulness; and had always done at once, and with her best endeavour, whatever Herr Schmälder had desired her to do. He thought, poor innocent man, that Azra was afraid of the Prince; and, as the great musician had the utmost contempt for the Prince’s scant knowledge of music, he was somewhat indignant that any

one who had ventured to sing before him, great in Vienna, renowned in Paris, the best teacher, as he thought himself, in the world (with the exception of Porpora) should care about the approval, or disapproval, of an ordinary Russian Prince ; a species of well-bred savage, as, in the pride of art, Herr Schmälder deemed him to be.

The maestro scolded Azra roundly ; and, as if to punish her, chose one of the most difficult works to execute which could have been put before any beginner. She had, however, been tried in it before. He knew, therefore, that she could do it admirably. And so she did. The very confidence which, arising from her simplicity, the gypsy girl generally manifested in her singing, was broken down on this occasion ; and there was a certain exquisite tremulousness brought into play, which had never been known in her singing on any previous occasion.

The success was very great. The Prince was in ecstasies ; and Herr Schmälder threw from his forehead, with both hands, his large masses of

unkempt hair, which with him was a sign of the utmost approval.

The eyes of the Princess and of Azra turned to the countenance of Ivan. In it there was astonishment, there was approbation; but both of the girls felt that Ivan was less charmed than either of the other by-standers. He, alone, expressed a wish for the Princess to sing again. She resolutely declined, saying that, after such singing as Azra's, it was but cruel kindness to her, to ask her to display her manifest inferiority. At this moment she had her arm round Azra's slender waist, and was regarding her with much fondness. The Princess had now thrown herself fully into her part, and for the moment was a devotee to Azra. In truth she was a little angry with Ivan for his not sympathizing with her in her admiration of the gypsy girl.

The music-lesson degenerated into a conversation about music, occasionally varied by the maestro's making Azra repeat, after instructions given by himself, certain parts of the concerted piece in which she had so distinguished herself.

And then Herr Schmälder, whose minutes were very precious, and who could not outstay his time, took his leave. The Princess, by some slight indication, conveyed to Azra that she also should leave the room.

Then the Princess, after much praise of Azra's singing, in which she was heartily seconded by her father, began to speak with him about Ivan's future career.

"You know, dear father, how good he was to us when we were in Siberia. Our fires would not have cheered us at eventime, if it had not been for him. We can never do enough to show our gratitude to this true friend."

Ivan absolutely loathed this kind of conversation, occurring, too, in his presence; but the old courtier, on the contrary, revelled in it. It gave him an opportunity for displaying all his worldly wisdom; and, with advice not far different from that of Polonius, did he show most indisputably how Ivan was to rise at Court, to which altitude the Prince would give his best aid to raise him. His Excellency entered minutely into the character of their

present Empress ; and Ivan, even while he could hardly master his disgust at being treated as he was by the Princess, could not help being somewhat amused by the real skill which the Prince manifested in delineating a character which, as His Excellency thought, was worthy of the utmost and most minute investigation. Of the feelings of those persons who surrounded him during that hour of the music-lesson, and of the play (tragedy, or comedy, it would be difficult to say which), that had been enacted before him, the Prince was profoundly unobservant and unconscious ; but he knew well the characters of his colleagues, and of his Imperial Mistress ; and not the slightest of their gestures, or their expressions, was ever lost upon him.

Ivan lingered on ; but if he did so with a hope of being, for a moment, alone with the Princess, he was much mistaken in that hope. The old courtier was in his proper element. He was showing alike his gratitude and his sagacity ; and, if Ivan had stayed for another hour, the Prince would hardly have desisted from making

the most of an opportunity, so welcome to him, as that of instructing a young man, a very excellent young man, in the sure art, sure at least to those who know how to make good use of it, of rising at Court.

There were one or two sayings uttered by the Prince which much impressed Ivan at the time, and which, long afterwards, lingered in his memory. "The greatest man of this age, my young friend, would be the man who should know everything, and yet hold his tongue."

Doubtless, the word 'everything' meant everything at Court or connected with Government, which, according to this accomplished courtier, was the only knowledge upon earth worth having.

Another of the Prince's sayings was "Above all things, do not be anxious to shine: if shine you must, let it be in broad daylight, not when all around you is dark. The glowworm has the shortest life of all insects."

The Prince may have been inaccurate in his natural history; but his maxim is not in other respects untruthful. The German poet Pfeffel

has given an exquisite fable to the same effect:—

The toad spat all his venom at a glow-worm. "What have I done to you?" asks the poor worm. "Why did you shine?" was the toad's reply.*

When Ivan moved to go away, the Prince moved too, and accompanied him even to the door of the palace, shaking hands warmly with him, reiterating scraps of sound and wholesome advice, and saying what pleasure it would give him to be of any service to his young friend.

The previous parting between the Princess and Ivan was also most friendly, "odiously friendly," was Ivan's bitter thought. How much

*Ein Johanniswurmchen saß,
Seines Demantscheins
Unbewußt, im weichen Gras
Eines Eichenhains.

Leise schlich aus faulem Moos
Sich ein Ungethüm,

Eine Kröte, her und schoß
All ihr Gift nach ihm.

"Ach, was hab' ich dir gethan?"
Rief der Wurm ihr zu.

"Ei," fuhr ihn das Unthier an,
"Warum glänzeßt du?"

G. Konr. Pfeffel.

can be expressed in the shaking of hands ! It can tell everything ; and how infinitely various it is !—from the tremulous, faint, tender pressure which physically is so slight, and metaphysically so significant, to the warm, hearty, wholesome pressure which means liking and friendship to any extent ; but not love : no, not love, never to be love.

It was this latter form which the Princess, not perhaps with perfect success, strove to adopt at this parting.

The Prince was a little deaf ; and the Princess without fear of being overheard, could say to Ivan as they parted, “ It can never be ; no, dear Ivan, it can never be.” And, the moment after she had spoken, she regretted, as being a failure in the perfection of her acting, that she had said “ dear Ivan.” He did not reply in words ; but his reproachful look—calm, indignant, and reproachful—was never effaced from the recollection of the Princess.

When alone, she did not endeavour to conceal from herself her anguish of mind. No look, no

movement of his, save when she was singing, had escaped her attention. There was a certain gesture of his, when he was pleased, which was well known to her. She had often playfully ridiculed him about it. When he was exceedingly pleased, he had a way of bringing his hands together, and then spreading them out widely. It was a gesture which he told her he had learnt from his Italian mother in early childhood; and, though it was not in harmony with Russian manners, he had never been able to break himself of it. It dwelt upon the memory of the Princess as she had seen it on an occasion very memorable to her, when, in that wood at Pelem (oh! that she were there again!) he had declared his love, and she had not denied hers.

In this trying hour which had just passed, she had, almost involuntarily, looked for this gesture of approval from Ivan. It had come after she had sung: it had not come after Azra had sung. The Princess felt how large and deep must be the prejudice of love when it could claim for her that superiority of approval and of interest which

ought undoubtedly to have been given to Azra. With that vast inconsistency which even the most persistent and resolute among us betray, she had been delighted, as she now owned to herself, that this mark of approval had been given to her rather than to the other.

“My own, my dearest, my best-beloved Ivan” she exclaimed to herself, “you will yet become a great man—the lord of many serfs mayhap; and how I envy the meanest of them, who, upon some act of graciousness—for you will be very gracious—has the joy and the delight of kissing your dear hand. Oh! would I were that serf.”

Meanwhile Ivan's hope had turned to the blackest despair, the despair being only mitigated, if so it may be said, by fury at her attempt to patronize him. Patronizing instead of loving! there cannot be anything which would evoke more indignation in the breast of a lover than this substitution of patronage for love.

It would be idle to say how many times Ivan repeated to himself the words of the Scriptures

“Put not your trust in Princes,” and how bitterly he arraigned the constitution of the world which had, so fatally for him, as he thought, created difference of rank amongst mankind.

Ivan’s hope, raised as it had been by the invitation to the Serbatoff Palace, had presented to his mind an image as glowing and beautiful as any gorgeous sunset; and now it had vanished as rapidly as that—the most fleeting phenomenon in nature. The lover calls his mistress to the window, to partake his delight; but when, hastening, she looks forth, it mostly happens that the glow has become faint, and the threatening clouds which made so large a part of the past beauty, are beginning to resume the dullness of their native colour.

The feelings of the Princess may best be described by the word anguish: those of Ivan by despair: those of Azra by bewilderment. Her trained habits of observation had not been laid aside during this important hour. Men understand men, women understood women, with an understanding that is not vouchsafed to

persons of different sexes. One look—it was but one—when the Princess with infinite but unconsciously-expressed tenderness, had gazed at Ivan after she had sung her song, had not been lost upon Azra. She wondered, with a wonderment that found no explanation to diminish it, how any woman could love a man so fondly, so devotedly, as she felt the Princess loved Ivan, and yet be cold to him, be merely friendly. And Azra said to herself that there was a world of thought and feeling among the great people of the earth, which those of her despised birth and breeding could not enter into, and could hardly imagine.



BOOK V.

BOOK V.



CHAPTER I.

A PRIMA DONNA AND HER LOVERS.

THE lives, even of adventurous men, move with much uniformity. There may be great mental changes, recognized, or not recognized, by the men themselves; but events of any signal kind, are, for years together, not frequent even for those whose lives are considered to be eventful. And so it was with some of the principal personages whose fortunes are related in this story.

Elizabeth's tenure of power, at first so dubious and so liable to change, had now some firmness in it. The foreign policy of Russia was beginning

to be a subject of the gravest consideration for the other European Powers ; and the home policy of the new Czarina was impressed, as far as it could be impressed by one mind combating against many, with the most marked feature of her character,—clemency : so that by writers of that period she is justly spoken of as ‘ Elizabeth the Clement.’

There was the usual waste of money, which, for one or two generations, had been notably felt in Russia. Elizabeth loved splendour of all kinds, and was devoted to the most expensive of all tastes—that of building. It may be remarked that, for the greater part of the eighteenth century, there was a fearful propensity to extravagant expenditure of every kind, at all the principal courts of Europe—an expenditure which, of itself, was sure to lead to great political changes. This private expenditure, however, if so it may be called, did not induce any parsimony in the worst of all forms of public expenditure—that of war.

Foreign warfare, except in its baneful effect of

increased taxation, does not much affect the lives of ordinary citizens ; and so, comparing the first years of Elizabeth's reign with the two or three preceding years abounding in great domestic events and startling revolutions, the time passed tamely on in Russia. Elizabeth was not vexed, like her great English namesake, by the expression of an urgent wish on the part of her subjects that she should marry, and thus provide a direct heir to the throne. There probably never was a female sovereign who was less favourably disposed to marriage than Elizabeth of Russia.

The succession to the throne was carefully provided for, the Empress choosing her nephew Peter, the Duke of Holstein, as her successor. She afterwards married him to the beautiful and accomplished Catharine, Princess of Anhaltzerbst,—little imagining, that by so doing she was practically ensuring a female succession to the throne—a succession to be gained by murder.

Three or four years of this comparative quiescence at the Russian Court had now elapsed ; and, for the readers of this narrative, more interest

is to be found in what was taking place at Paris than at St. Petersburg.

In a room, in one of the hotels of Paris, there sat a lady and gentleman. The room was handsomely furnished ; but there was noticeable a certain carelessness, not to say untidiness, in the way in which articles of dress and adornment were strewn about the apartment. Sheets of music were scattered everywhere. Splendid ornaments, some of them half in and half out of their cases, were to be seen lying about, as if they were unconsidered trifles. Silks and satins, and head gear of various kinds, were also to be seen ; and the whole aspect of the room created an impression that the owner of it was rich, careless, and either very much accustomed, or very little accustomed, to the splendour that surrounded her.

Her own dress conveyed the same idea. It was magnificent, and yet betrayed an appearance of negligence. She wore a long purple velvet gown, confined by a girdle, seemingly of emeralds set in gold, which, if it were real, must have been of almost inestimable value.

She was a beautiful young woman, and though small in stature, and of delicate features, had an air of command which was in strange contrast with this smallness and this delicacy. Upon her countenance there was a look of much determination, and yet of much anxiety, as of one who was about to make a great attempt, and would do so with all the force that was in her; but, at the same time, was by no means sure of the result. She seemed as if she were listening for something or somebody; and her thoughts were evidently far away from the present scene.

The countenance of her companion also betrayed anxiety, though of a different kind. It was a beseeching anxiety, and full of the present moment.

When he spoke to her he called her "Dearest:" when she replied, she called him "Baron;" and sometimes she failed to give the proper answers to his questions. He spoke of the past: her thoughts were evidently of

the future. There was an air of patronage about her mode of dealing with the young man. It could not be that she had the 'advantage' of him, as they say, in age, for he was about twenty-eight years of age and she twenty-four.

She had, too, the manner of a *grande dame*, such as was to be seen in that age renowned for *grandes dames*. And yet it could hardly be said that she was "to the manner born," but it was as if she played the part, though playing it admirably. In her hand she held a tuning-fork; and more than once she struck this upon the table, and listened carefully to the sound.

The Baron was depreciating Paris—a theme which was manifestly not very acceptable to the lady.

"Our beautiful Neva!" he exclaimed, "who can compare this wretched muddy rivulet, the Seine, with our Neva? Do you remember, dearest, our first walk by star-light on its banks near to the Church of St. Isaac's?"

Every word you then said dwells in my memory, and ever will remain there."

"Yes, Baron," she listlessly replied, "it was a fearful time for both of us. Had I been discovered, it would have been my death."

"You look ill, dearest," he replied "Oh! that I could do for you what you once did for me! Why will you continue to slave in this way, when there is no need for it?"

"Do not say that. There is need for it, and never more than to-day."

He took her left hand (he was sitting on a sofa by her side) and raised it to his lips. She did not make any objection to this proceeding, but seemed to take it as a matter of course; and, as he afterwards laid his hand upon the table near her, she played upon it with her fingers, evidently recalling some air; for at the same time she struck the tuning-fork, and softly sang this air. It was the well-known melody in the third act of *Les Indes Galantes*, a favourite opera in those days.

At this moment there was a knock at the street door, and then the sound of ascending foot-steps. The lady's colour went and came; and a deeper shade of anxiety overspread her countenance. Whoever this was that was coming up the stairs, he was either very dear to her, or he brought news that would have the deepest interest for her.

A servant announced 'Count Gluck;' and, thereupon, a middle-aged man entered the room. He was unmistakably a diplomatist, and there was that look of fine observation, and even of subtlety, which might be seen in most of the diplomatists of that age, when diplomacy was rather apt to degenerate into mere state-craft.

As the Count entered, the Baron's countenance fell; and a look of almost undisguised hatred sat upon his face. Totally regardless of the young man, Count Gluck advanced hastily to the lady, and whispered to her these words: "His Majesty will come. It is all settled. He comes in State."

The lady's face became radiant with joy.

“This is indeed, good news, Count Gluck. I had hardly ventured to hope for such an honour.”

After this, the conversation deviated into the ordinary topics of the day, such as the restoration to health of the King, the new mode which the Parisian ladies had adopted for dressing their hair, and the like. Suddenly the lady asked: “Is there any intelligence, Count, about that man I told you of? Do the police know anything?”

“Nothing,” Count Gluck replied.

“What man?” said the Baron.

“It is one,” replied the lady, “who ever haunts my steps—a gloomy-looking fellow, of a swarthy hue, rather shorter than the ordinary size of men, with a scar over his left eyebrow; and you can see that he is slightly lame when he walks.”

“You did not give me all these details before,” said the Count, who began to make a memorandum of them at a writing-table, at the other end of the room. Meanwhile the lady whispered to

the Baron: "Limbar, the man I told you of before, our old enemy. I shudder when I see that man; and he is always there."

Both the Baron and the Count endeavoured to reassure the lady, declaring that they would keep watch upon this man. From her description they would certainly be able to detect his presence. The conversation then languished.

The rivals, for such they were, endeavoured to outstay one another, as is the wont of rivals in such cases.

The wily diplomatist, however, was the first to go, for he soon perceived that it was the lady's wish to be alone; and he easily conjectured the reason. It was his cue never to be tedious, or to make his visits otherwise than most welcome. When he had gone, the lady did not hesitate, using the familiarity of an old friend, to bid the other go.

"You see, my dear," she exclaimed (this was the first time she had called him 'dear') "I have not a moment to lose. Signor Scala is coming,

and I do not feel at all sure of myself." The young man reluctantly departed.

Alas for constancy ! Alas for truthfulness in love ! The great lady was no other than the gypsy girl Azra, the Baron no other than Ivan de Biron.

Azra, in the course of the last few years, had, in accordance with the plan so well-devised and so well carried out by the Princess Marie, gone upon the stage ; had become a prima donna ; had enjoyed several triumphs at St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Vienna ; and was now to make her *début* before the critical audience of Paris. No wonder that she was anxious ! No wonder that she was delighted to hear that his Most Christian Majesty, by means of the good Count Gluck's persevering efforts at Court, would attend her first performance ! and no wonder that she was most desirous on this day to get rid of her admirers, that she might devote herself to frequent rehearsals of her part !

To an unobservant person it might seem, that Azra's nature was entirely altered ; but it was

not so. Her character had always been a very simple one; and the change was merely this—that instead of greatly loving any human being, she greatly loved her art, and was absorbed by it. Those only who have swayed hundreds or thousands of their fellow-beings by the magic power of eloquent speech, or captivating song, can realize what it is to meet the answering eyes of all those faces directed towards them, and to feel that each individual soul of the great audience in front of them is moved by their emotions, subdued by their thoughts, and led into perfect harmony with them by the supreme development of whatever thought or passion it is their pleasure, for the moment, to evoke. Those who have this rare power, whether they be great speakers, or great singers, or great actors, seldom care much for minor influences. Their love, if love it may be called, is apt to be of a universal character, and appeals not to any one person, but to humanity in general.

And so it fared with Azra. She had at one time loved, and loved hopelessly, the first true

gentleman she had ever known. And this was Ivan. But now he was, as it were, but one of a crowd to her; and the renowned songstress, who was also a great actress, could hardly be said to love anything else but her divine art.

And Ivan—the good and true Ivan, what had become of his constancy of nature? The Princess Marie had been but too skilful. Her plans had but too well succeeded, and Ivan had, almost unconsciously, succumbed to the attractions of her rival. We are all largely influenced by the effect of general approbation; and often we only then recognize the merits of those whom we have lived with and seen ever so closely, when these merits are brought into full light by alien applause. Hardly any distance renders vision so dull and makes the perceptive powers so feebly apprehensive, as the fatal nearness of familiarity can do. It was when Ivan ceased to see Azra daily, and when she became the leading personage on the boards of the theatres of St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Vienna, that he found

out how beautiful, how charming, how adorable she was.

Court favour in Russia, at that period, was a plant of rapid though not of hardy growth. A favoured courtier sprang forward, rather than walked, towards the object of his ambition. Thus, in the course of the last few years, Ivan de Biron, who at first had held but an inferior post in the Imperial Palace, had attracted the notice, and even the loving regard (so scandal unjustly said) of the Empress Elizabeth; and had certainly become one of her most favoured dependants.

His rise had been aided in no inconsiderable degree by his own merits. The early training he had received, had fitted him for the conduct of great affairs; and there were few men at the Russian Court more capable of directing those affairs, notwithstanding his comparative youthfulness, than Ivan de Biron.

BOOK V.



CHAPTER II.

THE PRIMA DONNA'S DÉBUT IN PARIS.

THE second effort, when the first has been successful, is the perilous one. The most trying of all rivals has then entered on the scene, the image of one's former crowned self. This is true, whether the effort be made in speech, in poetry, in song, or even, perhaps, in some athletic achievement.

Her first appearance on the Parisian stage was Azra's second effort. The audiences before whom she had hitherto appeared, were somewhat similar—at any rate as regards the value

attached to them by great artists, for even Vienna was not held to be equivalent in that respect to Paris, which then, and long afterwards, was the supreme arbiter in all matters of taste. Moreover, Azra partook the feelings of her race. Those cosmopolitan gypsies had a great respect for, and fear of, France. Perhaps it was that the laws respecting them were stricter and more severely enforced in France than elsewhere. Russia was, and is, a country where all tribes may bivouac, as it were; no tribe presuming to interfere with the despotic government, or indeed, venturing to profess any set of political opinions.

Azra, too, was well aware that her musical education had not been of that finished kind possessed by those who had hitherto acquired Parisian celebrity.

Again, the occasion was a great one. The King had not for some time favoured the Opera with his royal presence; and Louis the Fifteenth was still *Louis le Bien-aimé*.

For two or three hours before the commence-

ment of the Opera, the avenues to the Opera-House had been kept by the soldiery ; and even Azra's servants, who had not known that it was necessary to obtain a pass, found considerable difficulty in bringing their mistress's carriage to the stage entrance. She had herself more than once to explain to the officers on guard, who she was ; and would not then have gained her point, if the badness of her French had not gone far to verify her statement.

The Prima Donna, as at least she hoped to be, and certainly was for that occasion, arrived at her dressing-room in a state of much agitation. The enterprise seemed to be greater to her than she had ever hitherto imagined it to be ; and the resolute woman began to fear that she should quail before the critical audience she had now to encounter. Those terrors, which had beset her when she first appeared on the stage of St. Petersburg, in a part comparatively inferior, were resumed, and, indeed, greatly augmented, on this her first appearance at the Grand Opera of Paris.

There is a proverb of some European nation, which says something of this kind : "The mess is never eaten quite so hot as it was when it left the kitchen" — a homely proverb, but a consoling one. And it is especially true, when the mess has been cooked by imagination, creating a heat which happily the reality never quite equals.

Azra came upon the stage : and, after those first few moments, when the heart beats so violently that the voice cannot express itself, during which the eyes refuse to see anything distinctly, and all is wrapt in a mist of terror and confusion, Azra began to resume somewhat of her wonted presence of mind.

There was, however, a forced silence on her part which lasted nearly two minutes, a period that seemed to her almost an infinity of time. The good-natured audience recognized her embarrassment, and filled up this ugly interval by loud and continued plaudits.

It was the fashion in those days for people to be punctual in their attendance at public enter-

tainments ; and the King himself had arrived before the curtain was drawn up. Lastly, to add to the excitement, the Opera was somewhat of a novelty. It had only been performed twice in the course of the preceding year ; and there were many experienced connoisseurs who had never heard it.

In the course of the first Act, it could only be said that Azra was tolerably successful ; and her success threatened to be of that somewhat humiliating kind, so hateful to those who aim at the first place, which is called a "*succés d'estime*." The invention of this phrase, peculiarly French, indicates how skilful the Parisians are in criticism.

During the interval between the first and second acts, many a criticism was first started by some connoisseur, and then passed on to the receptive crowd, about a G in alto being defective, about a want of volume in the voice, and about a *floritura* being happier in the design than in the execution. There were those who said that this was all very well for St.

Petersburg, but was not quite the thing for Paris.

Another remark was, moreover, made : but chiefly by the ladies—that the dress was *bizarre*. And indeed it was *bizarre* ; for Azra, with that independence of nature which was peculiar to her, had adopted a dress of her own for the part. She had not had the prudence to ascertain, and to imitate, the costume for her part which had been adopted in the two previous representations by her predecessor, and which had, of course, followed French fashions.

It may be well, parenthetically, to mention that whether, from their untravelled simplicity, their better taste, or their freedom from conventionality, the Russian audiences were, in fact, better judges of costume than the Parisians.

Azra's skill in dress was really exquisite ; and she had hitherto followed that good rule of taste which made her adopt, in all cases, some costume which was especially suitable to her self. The Russians not only recognized this ; but they had been pleased and amused at the

gypsiness, as they had called it, which had always been visible in Azra's costume. At first she had come out with an Italian name, and professing to be an Italian; but too many persons had heard and seen her at the concerts of Russian Princes, to be deceived by that assumption of a foreign name.

The second Act commenced. Azra was more herself than she had been in the previous Act. The King was seen gently to approve; but this gentleness of approval, for Louis held himself to be a great connoisseur, was considered to mean much. There were now some persons in the audience, even amongst the learned, who having Royalty on their side, ventured to maintain doctrines differing from those of the more critical connoisseurs about the "G in alto and the volume of the voice." Still it was not by any means an acknowledged or an assured success; and the great body of the audience waited with an anxious and uncertain expectation as to what would be the result of the third Act, in which a celebrated duet between the

Prima Donna and the first tenor was to be sung.

We must pass, however, from their feelings and expectations, to those of three persons who were present in the Opera-House, and who took a far deeper interest in the proceedings than any common spectator. These were Count Gluck, Ivan de Biron, and Limbar the gypsy.

Count Gluck was exceedingly anxious as to the result. That result for him would be failure, if Azra failed. The astute diplomatist knew that his chance of winning the love of Azra, depended upon his furtherance of her success as a great singer. No diplomatic effort of his had been made with more art and skill than that by which he had succeeded in inducing Louis the Fifteenth to honour the opera by his presence, on this occasion. The Count, himself a good musician, had ventured in the least marked manner (being most anxious that the King should think the criticisms were his own), to point out passages wherein Azra had shown the peculiar excellence of her voice or of her

genius as an actress. The Count felt what was the nature, though he could not hear what was the substance, of the remarks which were made by the connoisseurs in the pit; and, for the moment, he almost regretted that he had given so much time and thought to bringing the King and the courtiers to the opera, and that he had not previously had some dealings with the connoisseurs and with the formidable band of *claqueurs* who were present.

Ivan's feelings were of a very different kind. He was not at all disturbed by the adverse criticism which, during the interval between the first and second Acts, he had heard in his place in the pit. Though he would not have owned this to any one else, he did not particularly desire that Azra should be successful. He had hitherto—with strange inconsistency—at the same time loved and loathed that success. Now, as he told himself, he did anything but long for her success; for he felt that if it were gained it would only remove Azra further and further from him. Loving her, too, as he did, he viewed

with a fierce envy, quite needless if he had known what great actresses and great singers feel, the affectionate demonstrations which Azra, completely fulfilling her part in this respect, lavished upon the first tenor, to whom she was not merely supremely indifferent, but for whom she had a positive dislike, seeing that he was a pedantic kind of young man who had vainly sought to instruct her as to the dress and manner in which she should perform her part; his notions of that dress and manner having been impressed upon him by the Prima Donna who had played the same part in the preceding year.

Ivan, however, had little time or thought to give to Azra's success or failure, or to the endearments she might bestow upon her transitory stage-lover. The words which Azra had said to him respecting the gypsy, Limbar, dwelt in his mind. He felt, with a kindred feeling, why it was that this dangerous man had haunted her steps. From the first moment of Ivan's entrance into the theatre, his attention had been given to ascertaining whether Limbar was present. He

could not find him anywhere. He searched the pit: he looked over the boxes. There was no Limbar there; nor, indeed, as Ivan felt, was he likely to be there.

The gallery in those days, when gas had not been invented, was too obscure for Ivan to recognize from a distance any countenance in the motley assemblage gathered there. But, between the acts, he had made his way to the gallery, and had in vain sought to discover any face which he could say was that of the gypsy. Ivan, moreover, thought he knew the face, for he too, in his frequent attendance while Azra was playing at St. Petersburg and Moscow, had not failed to notice this man. Ivan loved Azra with a love greatly surpassing that of the courtier and diplomatist, Count Gluck. Her apprehension of danger from Limbar had made a deep impression upon Ivan; and he feared for her safety. Perhaps we should not do him wrong in conjecturing that he imagined that if he could render some signal service to Azra, such as the prevention of any daring scheme that Limbar

might have in his wild mind to the detriment of Azra, her old love for himself might be renewed in all its former fulness and sincerity.

And what were Limbar's thoughts? This savage lover had not followed Azra from place to place without an object. He was desperate; and had resolved that he would at least be the death of any favoured lover. Strangely enough, his suspicions had not fallen upon Ivan, upon Count Gluck, or upon any other of Azra's numerous admirers in the upper ranks of society. Limbar, deceived by the mimic passions of the stage, was ready to believe that Azra really loved those whom the necessities of life upon the stage compelled her to appear to love. Narrowly had the *jeunes premiers* at St. Petersburg and Moscow escaped death at Limbar's hands; and it was only that knowledge which the gypsies of that day, and perhaps of this, possess of the real loves and likings which those whom they watch, entertain, that had hitherto preserved the Russian *jeunes premiers*.

The third Act commenced. In the course of

this act the business of the stage made it necessary that Azra should be very ardent in her demonstrations of love to her then recovered lover. And she did not underact her part. Any rude, untutored mind might well believe that she doated with a real affection upon the hero of the stage. Limbar's feelings of envy and jealousy were excited to the uttermost. At the end of that duet when Azra embraced and clung about the beloved tenor, a pistol shot resounded through the theatre. Azra was seen to fall; and was carried away bleeding from the stage.

The house was in tumult and confusion. The King was seen to leave his box, for Louis the Fifteenth was really agitated by the event. We must not inquire too curiously whether such an admirer of beauty as that monarch, might not be anxious to see the new singer more closely, as well as to render some assistance to her. The King, with that quickness of observation for which he was renowned, had perceived at once that the injury could not be a fatal one, or even

of a serious character. Indeed, the wound, which was in the left arm, was but slight, the bullet having done little more than grazed the surface.

Shortly afterwards, Count Gluck, who had followed the King, was seen to return to the Royal box ; and, after whispering to one of the *dames d'honneur* of the Queen, to take away her lace shawl.

Almost immediately afterwards, the manager came forward and made a short speech, stating that the attempted assassination had had but little effect ; that the Signora was but slightly wounded ; and, in ten minutes, would again courageously appear before them. This announcement was, of course, received with thunders of applause.

Meanwhile, Limbar had disappeared ; and, notwithstanding all the vigilance of the Parisian police, was not arrested.

The remainder of the third Act was suppressed ; but Azra came on the stage at the appointed time in the fourth Act, the injury to

her arm, and its bandages, being concealed by the lace shawl which Count Gluck had taken from the *dame d'honneur*. From that moment, monarch and people vied in their plaudits of encouragement.

Azra, to whom those plaudits gave new life, sang with a force, a spirit, and even with a correctness that she had never manifested, on the stage, before. In fact she sang as well as she had often sung when alone. Her triumph was complete.

One person only went home from the opera that night saddened and dispirited, hopeless indeed of future favour, and infinitely regretful of having missed a golden opportunity.

This person was Ivan de Biron.

BOOK V.



CHAPTER III.

IVAN LEAVES PARIS, AND RETURNS TO ST. PETERS-
BURG—STATE OF AFFAIRS AT ST. PETERSBURG.

THE enthusiasm at Paris in favour of the new singer was immense. Whenever she appeared on the stage, she was welcomed with the utmost fervour. The throwing of bouquets was a mode of recognizing merit not invented in that day. Encores were infrequent; and that wonderfully absurd practice of calling on the principal actors and actresses to appear at the end of an act, whereby whatever illusion remains for the stage, is in danger of being utterly

dispelled,* had not been adopted, or even attempted. But whatever demonstrations of approval were then in vogue, Azra enjoyed a full share of them.

A hundred romantic stories were invented about her: she was loudly greeted when seen in the street; and even grave personages paid court to her, thinking it not improbable that she might supersede the royal favourite of the day.

Ivan saw and heard these demonstrations with gloom and vexation of spirit. Even Count Gluck began to fear lest Azra's success should prove too great for his designs, and quite remove her from anything like patronage on his part.

Azra would have been more than mortal, if she had not been touched and gratified by this

* This absurdity culminates, when you see the tyrant and the slave—the rejected lover and the accepted lover—the prisoner and his jailer—come on, hand in hand, to receive the plaudits of an unthinking crowd that does not seem to know the first and humblest principles of the art which they are doing what they can to destroy by their ill-considered demands.

almost overwhelming success. Still there was a certain element of vexation to her also. She felt that much of this acclamation was due to the incident of Limbar's attempt upon her life. She had hoped to triumph by her art alone; and, even, as regards that, she felt all the humility and depression of mind which, except with very vain people, is sure to attend any great success.

Ivan's stay at Paris was limited. He had only leave of absence for a certain time, and did not dare to exceed that time. Indeed, the very perilous circumstances in which every Russian Courtier at that period was placed—circumstances well known to Ivan—made him fear that he had lost much ground by venturing to be absent at all from St. Petersburg.

It has been said that it was rather a dull and uneventful period at the Russian Court; and that Elizabeth's power was consolidated. Still there was some latent dissatisfaction, which had not escaped Ivan's notice. The first enthusiasm which pervaded Russia on Elizabeth's seizure

of the throne, had considerably subsided. The new favourites, many of them men of low origin and insignificant pretensions, had behaved with the insolence and rapaciousness that were to be expected from them. Lestocq was as giddy, vain, and loquacious as ever. The Preobrazhenski guards astonished St. Petersburg by their follies of speech and action, and their lavish expenditure. Indeed, they had conducted themselves much as the graver men had done in the short preceding reign of the Duchess Regent, when even Count Münnich, making too much profit of his favour, had lost that favour both with the Duchess Regent and his Colleagues. It requires great discretion for one, who has been a King-maker, to retain the favour of the Sovereign he has made, by not presuming too much upon his handiwork; and it was not to be expected that such persons as these common soldiers of the guard, should conduct themselves discreetly.

It is desirable to refer to the fall of Münnich, for had that vigorous and active man been in

favour at St. Petersburg when Lestocq's conspiracy was formed it is very unlikely that it would have succeeded.

It was not a time, as Ivan thought to himself, for him to be absent from Court; and yet, perhaps, it would have been well for him, if he had prolonged his stay at Paris. But this he did not venture to do.

Ivan was too sensible a man to put his hopes to the final test on the occasion of his departure, and to ask Azra, once for all, whether she would marry him: "Not now," he said to himself, "not now, while she is intoxicated with success, will I make the great venture of my life." Determined, too, as he was, to withdraw her from the stage if she should become his wife, he felt that the present moment would be the worst to choose for such a project.. Here, again, he was wrong; for it is after failure—failure which is felt by the person failing to be undeserved—that there is least chance of persuading that person to relinquish the course of life which he or she has adopted. Success may cause satiety: failure, never.

Before leaving Paris, Ivan contrived, though with much difficulty, to have private interviews with Azra. In the course of one of these interviews, he presumed to warn her against the intentions of Count Gluck. He is a bad man, Ivan said, a crafty, dissembling, self-seeking man. "He would never have loved you, Azra, if he had known you first, when I did. It is not the gypsy, Azra, so dear to me in those past days, but the celebrated Signora Hurtaldi that Count Gluck pays court to, hoping doubtless, thereby to re-establish his own precarious fortunes."

Azra answered coldly. Indeed she could answer without any effort to control emotion; for, at this moment, she was heart-free; and, the truth must be told, all the time that Ivan was talking, she was thinking *more* of a new part she had to play, than of anything "dear good Ivan" as she called him to herself, was saying to her.

One topic, with signal want of judgment, Ivan finally ventured to touch upon. It related

to Louis the Fifteenth. This did recall Azra from any thoughts about her new part, and roused her indignation greatly. Among the rude people of her tribe, if there was coarseness of speech, there was a certain purity of life which made such an allusion to a wicked possibility an undoubted insult in Azra's eyes. Poor Ivan did all that he could to efface the impression which his unwary words had made. But he had not succeeded in doing so, before she was summoned for rehearsal. The interview was obliged to be abruptly broken off; and Azra and Ivan parted from one another with more sorrow and regret on his part, with less liking on hers, than they had ever known before.

How changed was the aspect of things from what it had been in those days when Azra was the sole comfort to Ivan in his trouble and his desolation; when she was his only confidante; or when she shared those lessons with the Princess Marie at which she only assisted, in the hope and belief, as she said to herself, that

she should be the means of reconciling the lovers—a sorrowful hope which, when for a moment it seemed likely to be realized, had filled her heart with a terror and an anguish that, despite of all her noble endeavours at self-sacrifice, she could not overcome.

Gladly now, and with a thorough sense of relief, she heard the sound of the departing wheels of Baron Ivan de Biron's carriage, as it proceeded on its way to Vincennes, the first stage on the road from Paris to St. Petersburg.

The only words that Ivan might have been heard to exclaim, if there had been any one to overhear him, were “What will Kalynch say now?”

BOOK V.



CHAPTER IV.

KALYNCH AND HIS THEORY.

“WHAT will Kalynch say now?” This had become a proverbial saying amongst all those people who had the good fortune to be acquainted with Kalynch.

And who was Kalynch? He was an honest Courlander, who had long been a servant in the Biron family, and had accompanied the Duke of Courland when he came with the Empress Anne to Russia.

Kalynch had lately been entrusted with private despatches from his Highness at Jaroslaw to

Ivan; and Ivan had, with the Duke's permission, retained him in his own service for a time, being very desirous at this critical period to have one faithful friend and servant whom he could thoroughly rely upon.

There are many faithful servants, however, who do not acquire in their own circle the celebrity of Kalynch; or, as regards whom, any anxiety is expressed as to what they will say upon any particular occasion.

But Kalynch had a theory—one which, according to his opinion, rendered plain the doubtful matters of this troublesome world, and was of universal application.

It is often said that neither good fortune, nor evil fortune, lasts long; and there are pleasant proverbs to somewhat of the same effect, such as “The darkest hour of the night is just before the dawn.”

But these are vague sayings, which only shadow forth the precise theory which Kalynch had made his own. He held that good and ill fortune came alternately to every human being,

with absolute certainty,—and in an ascending scale. For instance, if you could measure good or ill fortune by absolute numbers, he held that if an evil event, estimated at three, came upon you, this was to be followed by a favourable event estimated at four ; and so on, in a recurring series. But what he most insisted upon, was the invariableness of the alternation of good and evil. This was his one idea, and he held to it grimly. He would not have lived with any one who had presumed to treat lightly this theory of his ; and even the great Duke of Courland did not dare to jest at it in Kalynch's presence. There was a time when Ivan as well as the other junior members of the Biron family, had believed in it implicitly.

Not even fond mothers love their children more than men their pet theories. Facts must be made somehow or other to conform to them. Perverse and seemingly intractable facts must be taught to know their proper places.

The events which Kalynch submitted to his iron law of alternation, were to be equivalent

events. A small piece of good fortune did not necessarily follow upon, or rather chime in with, a great disaster. Each set of events had its own proper increasing series.

Occasionally the Kalynch law seemed to break down—but not to Kalynch's own mind. The good man was unconscious of sophistry; but he had, nevertheless, a most ingenious way of dealing with refractory facts. Following a disaster, there would perversely come another disaster. This would have been felt to have been an untoward circumstance by any lukewarm believer in the Kalynch law—but not so to the discoverer of that law. He always found out that the second disaster was immediately and inevitably connected with that prior one which unthoughtful people imagined to be an isolated fact—that, in short, the two facts were one and indivisible. No commentator was ever more skilful in reconciling apparent inconsistencies, than was Kalynch in dealing with stupid facts that did their best to be contradictory. He had a simile, too, which was invariably brought out on such occa-

sions. The world was much agitated about comets at that period. There was a kind of misfortune, Kalynch said, which was cometary. There was the nucleus and there was the tail; but ignorant observers did not always see that the nucleus and the tail constituted one body, and obeyed one law.

The man was very popular with all who knew him. When misfortune befel any one of them, it was delightful for him to have a friend who, sympathizing with him warmly (for Kalynch was a most kind-hearted man), was yet cheerful and even joyous over the sad event, for was it not the herald of some signal piece of good fortune which was to follow?

When the good fortune did come, the fortunate man laughed at his good friend Kalynch's consequent forebodings; and then ventured, not, however, in his presence, to deride his theory.

Kalynch was a comforter at the time when most men most desire to be comforted. And, in prosperity, his friends could afford to listen with a smile to his prognostication of certain coming evil.

During his service in the Biron family, Kalynch had enjoyed large opportunities of observing the recurrence of good and evil fortune ; and he maintained that his theory, not that he called it a theory, had always proved true in that family. He, alone, of all the Duke of Courland's adherents, had not been dismayed by his master's 'downfall. He only waited for the corresponding favourable event which was to raise the Duke still higher in the world.

Kalynch had now taken Ivan's fortunes into his earnest consideration ; and, of course, things were happening just as they ought to happen, and must happen. Ivan had lately received a great place at Court, and was in high favour. Kalynch divined from Ivan's sad and downcast looks that he had now been unsuccessful in love—it was no secret that Ivan was devoted to Azra—and so, again, the course of human affairs obeyed its proper law. Kalynch was very cheerful—even sprightly—as the next piece of good fortune for his dear young master would evidently be of a generous and ample kind—what

the ninth wave is to any of the preceding eight. Kalynch, as, from time to time, he furtively regarded Ivan, and saw how deep was his dejection, felt assured of the proportionate grandeur of the coming event of prosperity.

Kalynch, in person, was a thin spare man, with a rigid but imposing set of features. He spoke deliberately, as a man should, whose words were as the words of fate. He had a trick of speech which had always afforded much amusement to his masters, for he could not restrain himself in it, even before them. After any one of his measured sentences, he was in the habit of saying in a lower tone, but still with distinctness, "Yes, yes certainly" or, to translate the Russian words more accurately, "Yes, yes, he has said it."

Thus poor Kalynch betrayed by open speech, that which most of us think, but do not say aloud.

BOOK V.



CHAPTER V.

THE LAPOUSCHIN CONSPIRACY—SOME OF ITS RESULTS.

IT is a pretty device of some moral philosophers, and a very well-intended one, to maintain that the fates and fortunes of all men are equal, or at least, tend to equality. The ill-luck, however, that exists in the world, is not by any means divided equally amongst its inhabitants. Certainly, Ivan de Biron was a man marked out for a continuance of ill-fortune; and even those events which seemed to partake of the nature of prosperity for him, were nearly sure to be attended by very adverse circumstances. During

the time that he was private secretary to the Duke of Courland (an appointment which he shared with an Englishman of the name of Shaw,) it seemed as if nothing could shake the Duke's power, and so depress the fortunes of his much envied private secretary. The Duke was a Sovereign Prince ; and it was not to be expected that, even should any mishap occur to him as regarded his position of prime minister in Russia, he would cease to be powerful in his Duchy of Courland. It happened otherwise, however, as we have seen; and Ivan had to share the exile of his master.

Recovering from that disaster, Ivan returned to St. Petersburg—there, again, to meet with misfortune, but to conquer it; and apparently to enter upon the high road of good fortune. He was now much courted in the society of that capital. It was nearly impossible for one in his position to remain unconnected with party. At that period the great drawback upon the development of civilization in Russia, was the deficiency of any large and powerful body of men who should not be immersed in party, or

be free from the inevitable downfall which followed upon the revolution (it can be denoted by no lesser word), occasioned by any change of ministers.

It had previously been a great comfort to Ivan, that the House of Serbatoff was connected with that party of the State, under which Ivan was disposed to range himself. Their joint fortunes, however, were at this moment, though they did not know it, in great peril by reason of the imprudence of a few members of that party.

There was also a private cause of danger which they recked not of. They were unfortunate enough to have amongst their number the most beautiful woman in Russia, the Countess Lapouschin. This woman was especially hateful to, and hated by, the Empress. Scandal said that the chief cause of this enmity was the pre-eminent beauty of the Countess; but this probably, like many other scandalous assertions, was only partly true. It is a more than usually unjust accusation, that which is brought against women, of being jealous of other women's beauty, and unwilling

to recognize it. On the contrary, they are often more attracted by it even than men are. The stories told against the Sovereigns of Russia, and other great people at their Court, during that period, are to be received, as the Romans would have said, with many grains of salt; and much of what is said against them is as untrue as probably the tales of Suetonius are about the Roman Emperors.

There were other reasons than the one commonly assigned, which made the Czarina very bitter against the Countess Lapouschin.

Her singular beauty gave her great sway in Russian society; and, in that society, she was one of Elizabeth's most potent and most provoking enemies. The Empress knew well that her conduct was open to much censure, and, what was probably more galling, to much ridicule. It may fairly be conjectured that it was more on account of Madame Lapouschin's sharp tongue, than of her beautiful face, that the Empress Elizabeth was infuriated against her.

It happened that a great dinner-party was

given at the house of the Lapouschins, or of some friend of theirs, at which party Ivan, after his return to St. Petersburg, was present. The conversation turned, as the conversation generally did turn, amongst these people, upon the faults and follies of the Empress; and “many shocking things,” to use the words of a contemporary, were said against Her Majesty upon this occasion.

It will be recollected that a man of the name of Nariskoff had been one of the exiles at Pelem—the one who was mainly instrumental in discovering to his fellows the presence among them of the hated Duke of Courland. Obscure as he was, he had not been forgotten in the general recall from exile, which had taken place immediately upon the seizure of the throne by Elizabeth. He was a guest at this dinner of the Lapouschins, for he had again become a favourite at the tables of the great. Previously to his exile, his wit, chiefly turned towards ill-nature, had somewhat wearied them; but now he had a set of new topics, which, closely relating to

personalities of an amusing kind, were always welcome.

In exile, even the greatest personages, bereft of their ordinary sources of income, had made use of whatever special talent they possessed, to gain a livelihood for themselves, or to add to the common stock. This Prince had distinguished himself as a tailor: this Baron as a shoemaker: that Counsellor of State as a carpenter. Others had devoted themselves to the amusement of the miserable community in which they dwelt; and artistic talent of all kinds had been developed amongst them.

This afforded an excellent field for the wit and humour of Nariskoff; and his audience did not weary of hearing him describe, in the drollest terms, how the Prince stitched, and the Baron cobbled, and the Chevalier painted, and the Colonel sang. These narratives, moreover, had a special interest for a Russian audience, as the hearers could hardly help thinking how soon it might be their fate to exercise whatever talent was latent in them, for the purpose of gaining a

livelihood in Siberia. The result was, that Nariskoff became more popular than ever—that is as far as popularity can be indicated by invitations to dinner.

At this dinner, Nariskoff greatly amused the company by telling them of the proceedings of a certain Baron Neudorf, when in exile in Siberia. The Baron was known to most of them. In the society of St. Petersburg he had been considered a very dull man, and more than usually uninstructed. It pleased him, however, to set up as a schoolmaster at Pelem; and the malicious Nariskoff had often assisted at the school lessons. The wit's description of the way in which the Baron prepared for his teaching, and of his difficulty in answering the questions of the children, was exceedingly humorous.

One anecdote Nariskoff told, of rather a significant character. The Baron had asked what was the meaning of the word "exile." For a time there was no response from the pupils. At length one little girl stepped boldly forward to answer the question. She was the

daughter of a travelling merchant. The Duke of Courland's suspicions, and the punishment that followed those suspicions, were not confined to the higher classes alone.

The child's answer was, "Black bread for me and Tatiana—only little bits—and not a drop of vodka for father."

Whatever facetiousness there might be in this anecdote, was of a very grim kind, and might have awakened some reflections tending to cautiousness of speech, if that joyous company had been at all disposed to entertain any such reflections.

Nariskoff did not fail on this occasion to chime in with the general tone of conversation; and his description of the Empress's proceedings, his imitation of Director-general Lestocq, and his representation of a Preobraskenski common soldier, swaggering at a café, were not the least amusing features of this evening's dangerous conversation.

Ivan, as may be imagined, did not join in this clamour against his Imperial Mistress. On the

contrary it pained him much. He did not, however, endeavour to stem the torrent of ill-nature and disloyal comment which then broke forth. He knew too well that some of the accusations were justly founded, and that any attempt at defence would only provoke recrimination. Once or twice he sought to change the current of the conversation, but his efforts were unsuccessful.

The whole of that conversation and the names of the persons present were soon afterwards reported to the Empress; and Ivan had, thenceforward, to endure much contumely from her, of which he could not divine the cause.

It was a great evil, not only for Russia, but for most European countries, at that period, that foreign ambassadors thought it part of their duty to meddle with the internal affairs of the countries to which they were accredited. A certain Marquis de Botta had lately been the ambassador from the Queen of Hungary to the Russian Court. He had, as it may be remembered, taken a very active part in warning the

Duchess Regent of the danger to be apprehended from Lestocq's conspiracy, of which the Marquis had full cognizance.

This Marquis de Botta was now at Vienna; but he did not desist from his enmity to the Princess Elizabeth, now that she had gained the throne; and he was concerned in a conspiracy, in which it is said the Lapouschins were also engaged, together with Madame de Bestuchef, sister-in-law to the Chancellor, the Chamberlain Lillianfeld, and several other persons of more or less consequence.

It is exceedingly doubtful whether this so-called conspiracy had proceeded much further than vague talk and vague aspirations. The world said, at that time, and nothing has since come to light to disprove the saying, that the Empress was but too glad to avail herself of any pretext for avenging herself upon the beautiful Countess Lapouschin. A man of the name of Berger, a cornet of cuirassiers, was one of the persons who had betrayed the traitorous conversation of these partisans to the Empress and her

ministers. Berger was ordered to connect himself more closely with the conspirators. Upon further information that he gave, they were all arrested.

Elizabeth had now the conspirators in her power. If the conspiracy were not a full-fledged one, at any rate it was so far formed, or indicated, as to admit of the punishment for treason being awarded to all those who were nearly, or even remotely, connected with it. But Elizabeth was still "Elizabeth the Clement." Her fair rival now being completely at her mercy, the Czarina hesitated to condemn. As, however, it has been truly observed,

"There's some men of their bloody counsels boast,
As though the heart were difficult to harden."

And there are seldom wanting those who, in close proximity to the powerful, offer these bloody counsels, thinking that they will be sure to be acceptable, or fearing for themselves lest their political enemies, condemned to milder punishments, should ever be re-installed in

favour again. Elizabeth's Prime Minister and Chancellor, Bestuchef, urged upon his reluctant mistress to sign the warrant of condemnation of the Countess Lapouschin. The Czarina steadily refused.

A mode of influence was then brought to bear upon her which the astute Chancellor knew would have great effect. The Empress, as it has previously been shown in this narrative, was a very dutiful daughter of her Church. A Court preacher, whose name, unhappily, cannot be devoted to infamy, for it is unknown, delivered an eloquent and vehement sermon in the presence of the Czarina, which was divided into the two following theses.

The first was, on the obedience and fidelity due to Sovereigns, and further of the respect due to their sacred persons. The second dwelt upon the duty of sovereigns to punish, without regard of persons, those who dared to attempt anything against their lives, their honour (herein was the Countess most guilty), or their prerogative.

The effect of this eloquent discourse upon Elizabeth was visible to all those who were present on this occasion. No sooner had she withdrawn to her private apartments, than it was pressed upon her "that the intention of God himself was that she should punish these guilty persons." The warrant for their condemnation was then placed before her—and she signed it.

Madam Lapouschin was condemned to have her tongue cut out; and she died from the effect of this brutal mutilation.

After this execution had taken place, an undying remorse seized upon the heart of Elizabeth. It was then that she finally resolved never to sign any death warrant. She retained her Chancellor in power. She knew that he was the ablest minister whose services she could command. But she reproached him, as perhaps our own Elizabeth did not fail to reproach those of her ministers, who, on a like occasion, had urged these bloody counsels upon a reluctant mistress; and the Russian Elizabeth's memorable words were these: "You have deceived me

a hundred times," she said to her Chancellor, "You have employed God and the Devil to surprise my signature; you will never deceive me again. My successors, stronger than I am, will know how to punish you some day as you deserve."

It may well be imagined that if Elizabeth's generous reluctance to condemn the Countess (whom, now pitying, she cared for most) had been thus overcome, how little difficulty there must have been in obtaining her signature for the condemnation of the minor conspirators, in whose fate the readers of this narrative are more immediately interested.

BOOK V.



CHAPTER VI.

AZRA'S RETURN TO ST. PETERSBURG—IVAN'S ARREST
AND EXILE.

AZRA, or as perhaps she should be called, Signora Hurtaldi, had previously returned to St. Petersburg. The offers made by the Director of the Opera to procure that return had been most liberal. Their liberality, however, was not the cause which induced the Signora to accede to his proposal, for she was very indifferent to the pecuniary rewards for the exercise of her talent. A lingering desire to see Ivan again had more

weight with her. There was also a great pleasure in store for her, as she thought, in having to produce before her old and best-loved audience, the same opera in which she had been so successful in Paris—a success which had reached the ears of all the connoisseurs at St. Petersburg.

Ivan did not fail to renew his companionship with Azra, though he still feared to speak, even in the most guarded manner, of the subject that was nearest his heart.

Azra had taken upon herself much of the management and preparation which were necessary to place with full effect the new opera upon the Russian stage. She was a dictatress in all matters that related to the dress, scenery, and general arrangements for this opera, respecting which she alone had Parisian experience. Previously to the first representation, she passed most of her time at the Opera-house, where her presence was constantly needed to give the requisite directions. Ivan, when he wished to see her, had to seek for her there. The original.

cause of difference between them still existed. It was rarely, if ever, directly alluded to ; but each of them was fully aware of its existence, and that no change had taken place in the mind of the other respecting it. He was anxious to withdraw her from theatrical life : she was determined to remain.

The relations between Azra and Count Gluck were not known to any one, not even to Ivan ; but it may be conjectured that their intimacy had not proceeded further, and that more observation of the Count's character had compelled Azra to look upon his suit less and less favourably. In truth, if there was anybody in the world whom the Prima Donna really liked, it was her old friend Ivan. But for him there certainly was not that convincing love, or liking, which would induce her to be materially swayed by him, and to give up the delight of her life, her theatrical career, to please her lover.

It was on the day before the representation of the new Opera, that Ivan, in the afternoon, came

to the Opera-house, and sought an interview with Azra. He had just been suddenly dismissed from the Household of Elizabeth, and had been in much perplexity as to the course of life he should now adopt. Finally he had almost determined to return to Courland, where he had numerous connections, and where the influence of his former master, the Duke of Courland, might be most serviceable to him. With the Duke, who, though he was not allowed to return to Court, had not been formally dispossessed of his sovereignty over Courland, Ivan was still in friendly relation, and had indeed been the means of communication between His Highness and his partisans at St. Petersburg. Ivan resolved that now, or never, he must ascertain whether Azra would consent to marry him, and would, with him, enter upon the new life which he proposed to live in Courland.

He found her very busy, and not in the most amiable of moods, for, as mostly happens in such cases, there were many things which had gone wrong ; and much that she had expected to com-

plete, was not completed. Still she received him kindly, and apologized for the confusion in the midst of which he found her.

"I am so sorry, Ivan," she said (the familiar use of his christian name had recommenced at St. Petersburg), "to hear that you are no longer in the Household; but no doubt it is only a momentary caprice of the Empress's, and she will give you some higher office, something more worthy of you."

"You do not know her, Azra. Some one has poisoned her mind against me. I have seen it and felt it for some time. All is over for me in Russia. I am determined to return to Courland; and gladly should I return if—"

"If what, Ivan? Is there anything that I can do?"

"Yes: there is everything that you can do. You can come with me."

Azra grew pale as he said these words. "What! leave the opera!" she exclaimed, "leave St. Petersburg now! There is no opera in Courland."

“Why should there be? What should my wife want with operas?”

“No, Ivan: I could not, I really could not: you do not know what you ask of me.”

“I do know: I only ask what any woman who loved me, would at once grant. But you love me not, Azra. This painted mimicry of passion fills your heart.”

Here they were interrupted by the leader of the orchestra entering hastily, and requesting that Azra would come and listen to the chorus in the second Act, which was being “abominably done” — “abominably” repeated the little man, “and you must come and help me drill them, Signora.” Azra promised to come, and the man left the room.

It is hardly to be told with what passion—passion aided by despair—Ivan then pressed his suit. “Had she not once loved him? Had she not then been everything to him?”

Azra could have made an unpleasant answer to this question; but the generous girl forebore

to do so. She owned that she liked him better than anybody else; but she could not do what he wished her to do. That would be too great a sacrifice for him as well as for her.

Ivan grew indignant; and finally placed all his hopes and wishes upon a single and definite answer—Yes, or No.

Azra faintly uttered the fatal negative.

Again the leader of the orchestra made his appearance, and claimed her presence at the rehearsal. Ivan dejectedly followed her from the green-room to the stage. Here there were four persons who, as it appeared, were not at all required for stage business. They were a Lieutenant of Cuirassiers, accompanied by three privates of his regiment. No sooner did the Lieutenant see Ivan, than, going towards him, he touched him on the shoulder, demanded his sword in the Czarina's name, and told him that he was their prisoner.

Brief was the parting between Ivan and Azra; and apparently not more than that of ordinary friends, though he held her hand for

some short time in his, and looked with sad questioning into her eyes. But these she cast down; though she strove to return his fond pressure with a fondness equal to his own. And thus they parted.

Ivan was at first conveyed to Schlüsselberg, where he had to undergo a private judicial examination. It was clearly brought in evidence against him that he had been present at the dinners of the Lapouschins and their friends. His complicity in the plot against the Empress was inferred; certainly it could not have been proved; and the result was, that he was condemned again to exile in Siberia.

The representation of the new Opera was put off for some days on account of the indisposition of the Prima Donna. Some said that the arrangements for the Opera were not ready, and that this was the cause of the delay. This was not true; but when the first representation did take place, Azra's grief for Ivan's misfortune, and for their sad and sorry parting, though that grief was deep and real, did not prevent

her from making those exertions which sufficed to ensure as great a triumph for her at St. Petersburg as that which she had enjoyed at Paris.

BOOK VI.



BOOK VI.



CHAPTER I.

THE JOURNEY TO SIBERIA—IVAN DE BIRON AND
NARISKOFF IN THE FOREST OF PELEM.

THE journey to Siberia, even when it is a traveller and not an exile who journeys, is anything but joyous. The boundless plains, the sombre grey colouring, the few birch trees scattered here and there, in such disproportion to the vastness of the surrounding scenery as to justify Robert Hall's celebrated saying, on contemplating a similar region, that when a tree did appear, "it was only nature holding up a signal of distress,"—render the journey, even to the

most buoyant mind, a gloomy and a mournful one.

The traveller who, for the first time, comes from a champaign to a mountainous region, or from a land of hills and dales to a country of dead level, is, no doubt, somewhat astonished and bewildered. But, in their way to Siberia, there is that which affects most men more than any change in the mere form of country from that which they have been accustomed to—namely the absence of the signs of definite possession. In countries that are more civilized and more peopled, these signs of possession, which are visible even in very barren and in very lofty regions, give a feeling of welcome to the traveller, tell him of the conquests made by man, and indicate somewhat of peace, order, and security.

The limitless plain, on the contrary, when undivided by landmarks, creates a sense of the feebleness of man when compared with the vastness of the possession which he may have entered upon, but cannot be said to have subdued.

The regretful feelings, however, of the exile, the severity of the discipline by which he is driven along, and his many physical discomforts, leave him neither time nor heart to note much the scenery through which he is hurried, and which, perhaps, does not serve more than to form a gloomy and unpropitious background to his nearer and more pressing miseries.

Again the scene of action is Siberia. Again the time of the year is spring—that season, in all but the most favoured climes, the most repulsive,—and, in Siberia, absolutely hideous.

It was a still evening, with the usual damp mist pervading everywhere, when two men were walking in a glade that went for some miles through the forest neighbouring to Pelem. They were both well-known personages in this story, though it would have been doubtful whether those, who had known the younger of these men in former days, would, at first sight, have recognized him now. His countenance was still that of a young man; but it had acquired some of the marks and signs which belong

to middle life, if not to old age. The forehead was indented with those lines which are made by care and trouble, even more than by thought, upon that plastic material, the human face. Moreover the ends of the hair had begun to change colour; and it might be foreseen that, unless this change should be arrested by a change of mind, this young man would, in a few years, be prematurely grey.

His companion was unaltered as regards any marks signifying age, but a certain expression of sourness sat upon the face that had not been there before: his smile was far less pleasing even than it had been formerly; and it seemed as if the wit had become a confirmed cynic.

The companionship of these two men did not appear likely, from what is known of them, to be a close and enduring one. Any person who knew them both, would not have prophesied that they would have become constant allies and companions, for there was a frankness in the countenance of the younger man, which, if physiognomy can be relied upon, could

not well meet with any response from the other.

Yet there was a bond of friendliness and companionship of a very enduring character. The young man was an unhappy man, who had begun to take very gloomy views of human life. Nothing is more distasteful to such a man than the company of the hopeful and the cheerful. Their bright hopes and their gay speech are almost insults to him, or so he deems them. But he is somewhat comforted when he finds that any other person's views are still darker than his own. Indeed, his views may become comparatively bright by contrast. The great artists know and prove this. It is not until all the colours are in the picture, that you can tell what any colour may seem to be, for this 'seeming' depends upon the surrounding tints.

This appreciation of a gloomier nature than his own, was the motive that led the younger man to cultivate the friendship of the elder one. He, on the other hand, studied to make himself

agreeable to his young friend from a very different reason. Banishment to Siberia was not so severe under the rule of the Empress Elizabeth as it had been under former sovereigns, and, especially, during the time when the Duke of Courland was prime minister of Russia. The young man was, for Siberia, rich—that is, a small sum was allowed daily for his sustenance; whereas, the other was without a kopeck. Now, luxuries at St. Petersburg or Moscow—something more than the barest necessities of life at Pelem—were what the elder man most distinctly coveted, and would have sought for at any sacrifice. He, therefore, in general, adapted his talk to the humour of his companion, and sometimes even went extravagantly beyond it, seeing that this was the best means of securing the other's friendship, and all the good things that followed therefrom.

The elder man was Nariskoff: his companion was Ivan de Biron.

The forests in Siberia swarm with wild and fierce animals, not of the grander but of the

lower kind ; such as wolves, foxes, martens, wild-cats, and the like.

The two friends were apparently talking of one of these creatures, for which they evidently entertained a great aversion.

“ So fierce when provoked ! ” said Nariskoff.

“ Yes, ” said Ivan.

“ Such a revengeful creature ! ”

“ Hardly great enough for revenge, ” replied Ivan.

“ So cruel to its own species, ” said Nariskoff.

“ So deceitful, ” replied his companion.

“ Sees no further than its own narrow lair, and not much in that, ” exclaimed the elder man.

“ So false—so false, ” replied the younger.

“ Feline ! ” exclaimed Nariskoff.

“ So fickle—lures you on, and then— ”

“ So taken by mere finery. Diamonds are her divinities. ”

The listener would now have known that the creature these two men were talking of, was not any wild animal of the woods but a woman.

Now all this was very false talk on Nariskoff's part. He was a devoted admirer of women. It was they who, in his fallen fortunes, had been most kind to him : and he was not unmindful of this fact.

There is a just saying, or at least a plausible one, that it is bad men who speak ill of women. Now Nariskoff was not a bad man, but merely one whose nature was not strong enough to withstand the usual effect of misfortune upon the character ; and, for the moment, he merely said these spiteful things in compliance with the morbid humour of his companion.

But with Ivan, alas ! it was otherwise. A fine, noble, trustful nature had been deeply affected by the evil which had befallen it. We speak of ruin chiefly as applied to physical matters and to outward fortune ; but there may be such things as ruined natures ; and each of these men afforded an example of the danger of that sad possibility.

“They have uniformly been the cause of misery and misfortune to me,” said Ivan, resum-

ing the conversation. "The weak and pliable Duchess Regent, with her weak and indolent favourite, Juliana de Mengden—the voluptuous and shallow-hearted Elizabeth, under whose tyranny we suffer—that wonderful prima donna, the Signora Hurtaldi (she might have kept her pretty gypsy name, Azra)—that false, hard, and proud Princess Marie Andréeвна:—these women, one and all of them, have been a curse to me."

Nariskoff thought to himself, but did not give voice to the thought "He could not have been more unfortunate with women, even if he had been a man of genius."

"Do you know where we are, Nariskoff? No: how should you know! It is a part of the forest which is still resonant with woman's falsehood.

"You see that trunk of a tree? It has remained here while its kindred logs have been carried away. The thing is wicked—is accursed. Here a false girl, has, ere this, allowed a true and loving youth to sit beside her: and has listened to his tale of love with all due maidenly reserve, but still with no unwilling ears, for

then, clad in peasant dress, she held herself not so much above him. But diamonds! diamonds! as you said, Nariskoff; those bright pebbles make the difference—they have hearts of diamonds, I believe. Let us proceed with the story of the youth and maiden. They interchanged vows of constancy.”

“A scholar such as you, De Biron, having read your Horace and all about him and his Lydia, then talking of ‘vows of constancy’! a phrase at best of travelling pedlars, picked up from their peasant customers. The thing is unknown to decent people brought up in Petersburg and Moscow.”

“Ah! well,” resumed Ivan, “I will not say what happened besides, but a soft cheek may be no indication of a loving heart. Yes, it was here, she vowed she would be mine. But the air is different in St. Petersburg from that in Siberia. Though nipping here (Ivan shuddered as he spoke) it has some sense of truthfulness in it, while at St. Petersburg, if a true man were to speak truly, the shocked atmosphere would not

allow the truthful words to be conveyed without some damning perversion into falsehood. You should have seen her airs of patronage, when we met in the Palace. She and her courtly father are now, I doubt not, basking in imperial sunshine."

"You are fond of walking in this forest, De Biron," said Nariskoff: "you generally contrive that we should turn in this direction; and I am such an easy-going fellow that I am always willing to take the road my companions wish to travel."

"I love it, and I hate it, Nariskoff."

"You are mostly wrapt in a sublime reverie when you come hither—not a very bright companion! I don't think you see much of what is going on around you here."

"What should I see?" said Ivan. "I know the trees by heart. They are only less odious to me than the bare, barren, dreary plain with its morasses, on the other side of the town."

"What a loss it is!" replied Nariskoff, "not to

have a philosophic mind. I see numberless transactions in the forest which give me ample food for contemplation. Did you notice what I was doing a few minutes ago, near the great spruce tree, while you were leaning against it, and looking up into vacancy?"

"No:" replied Ivan, in an indifferent tone.

"Well, it was a most unphilosophic employment. I was endeavouring to prevent one of the myriad murders which are always being perpetrated in this peaceful abode of bliss, this forest. An idiotic reptile, a black thing, with many joints and convolutions, was taking his evening walk—if single, thinking of his wayward mistress; if married, thinking of his many family cares; or, if he had any germ of worldly wisdom, scheming how he should provide himself with supper. And he had the folly to walk near an ant's nest. Out they came upon him, as prompt to their work as Kirgish robbers. But these insects are certainly the most sensible creatures in the world. How different from men! The ants saw directly that four of their number would

be sufficient to do the business; and the others turned back in search of other prey. Now men never know how to apportion their numbers to their work."

"What is it they do know?" said Ivan.

"Oh, two or three things," replied Nariskoff. "The truth is; man is very well in his way: the world is very well in its way: only man is not quite equal to the position which he holds in it. Whether he ever will be, is a question."

"Well, well," said Ivan, somewhat peevishly, "but what about the other insects you saw?"

"People don't understand me," continued Nariskoff: "there is a great deal of chivalry in my composition. Ignoring the high probability that the other ants would attack me, as indeed they did, I rushed to the rescue of my wriggling, black friend, though, as a general rule, I dislike fools, and do not much care to aid them. But I could do nothing for him, without committing murder, myself. When I brushed off one of his

enemies, the others stuck to him all the same, sucking out his life-blood. By the time I had brushed another off, the vigorous little wretch, whom I had first displaced, returned to the charge. Eventually, poor little blackie and myself became exhausted by our efforts; and I was obliged to leave him to his fate. You saw nothing of this heroic struggle."

"Not much:" said Ivan.

"If you looked more about you," rejoined Nariskoff, "you would be a wiser and perhaps a happier man. Don't you see that we are all made to prey and to be preyed upon? Man is the noblest creature in creation: at least he always says so in his books; and, as the other creatures have had the good sense to conceal their talents for reading and writing, they never care to contradict him. Now, how much too happy men would be, and how unfairly the world would be arranged, if there were no such creatures as women to torment those who torment all the other created beings.

"It's very stupid of you not to understand

these things, and to take your ill-fortune, as you call it, so much to heart. Why, I myself,—but that's no matter—it was only the old story."

"Yes; old enough no doubt," exclaimed Ivan. "When there were but ten women in the world and seven men, there were ten deceivers on the earth and seven dupes."

The words of the young man were so bitter and his gestures so fierce, that Nariskoff, not much accustomed to indulge in feelings of pity, felt for him, and even changed the tone of his rejoinders. He spoke, as a man of the world, of what he was pleased to call the love of young bears before they can walk upright on their hind legs; made excuses both for young men and young women, as regards their delusions in the early spring of life; and, warming with his subject, for the man could be eloquent as well as cynical, he did his best to comfort Ivan. He said that there was a future still before him; that he would yet find his true love, who would be neither princess, nor player: and he drew a

droll picture of Ivan as a father of a large family, all of whom would delight in uncle Nariskoff, and climb upon his knees to hear his wondrous stories about the bears and wolves of the Siberian forests.

Ivan looked at his friend in astonishment. He was not altogether displeased with this picture, and he was certainly amused at its being depicted by Nariskoff, who had never, hitherto, indulged in such an outburst of gracious fancy.

“And where is this paragon to come from? A spirit of the wood, I suppose! So fierce when provoked, so revengeful, so cruel to its own species, so purblind except in its own small circle, so feline, as a certain wise friend of mine not long ago informed me, and yet—perfection! And this paragon is to fall in love with a wretched exile.”

“I did not say, De Biron, that she was to be perfection. Nobody can accuse me of ever attributing perfection to man or woman. But I will tell you something—something which is

worth a great deal of money, and of which I could make good barter at St. Petersburg. They talk of first love. Poets and poetasters rave about it. They would have you believe that it is something divine, something which can never be renewed, something which gods and goddesses smile upon benignly. It is all stuff. How should it be otherwise?"

Here he paused for a minute or two, and Ivan thought he had ended. Meanwhile, Nariskoff had sat down upon that felled tree of which Ivan had spoken. And he sat, where she had sat. Ivan gently lifted him up. Nariskoff understood it all; and, with difficulty repressed a smile. Then he said: "This was my valuable saying. Talk as they may about first love being the lasting one! It is the last love that lasts, if any."

The friends walked on in silence to the town; and Ivan, when he reached his hut, being absorbed in thought, failed to invite Nariskoff, as had been his wont, to enter with him, and share his evening meal.

Nariskoff said to himself, as he turned homeward, "This comes of doing a good-natured thing, but I will not again commit the same error."

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER II.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE SERBATOFFS AT PELEM—
NARISKOFF'S DESIGN.

IVAN imagined that Pelem had been chosen as his place of exile for some special reason; and he had puzzled himself in thinking over the question whether this choice was a mark of favour, or the contrary. It was, however, only an instance of the hap-hazard way in which official matters are sometimes settled in despotic countries, and even, occasionally, under constitutional governments.

The order for his exile had come from the

minister without any directions as to the place of exile. A junior clerk had said to another junior in the office: "Where is the poor devil to go to? There is no place named."

"Where was he the last time?" replied the other.

They looked; and found that it was Pelem.

"Let's send him there," said the first speaker. "I dare say he would like it best. You remember him in the Duke's time. He often came to the office, and he did not swagger about so much as the other private Secretaries. He had always a good word for a fellow. Enter him for the next batch to Pelem. I say! his barony hasn't done him much good, has it?"

This was the amount of care and thought which had been given to determine Ivan's place of exile, and, to discover which, he might long have puzzled his brains before arriving at the real solution.

Ivan was entirely wrong, when, in his last conversation with Nariskoff, he had pictured

the Serbatoffs as revelling in imperial favour. They were, unhappily for them, connected with one or two of the principal persons concerned in the Lapouschin conspiracy. They had even been present at some of the dinners given by the Lapouschins, or their friends; and the conversation which then took place had been reported, if not accurately, at any rate with no desire to render less offensive the terms in which the conduct and character of the Czarina had been commented upon by the guests. It may be imagined how distressing to Prince Serbatoff was any talk defaming the Empress, or indeed any persons in high authority. Great were the efforts which^{*} he made to divert the conversation into less dangerous channels; and he had, latterly, avoided accepting any invitations to houses where he found that this kind of talk was prevalent. His caution, however, came too late: he was already compromised—compromised! a word of horror to that veteran courtier. Shortly after the time when Ivan had been dismissed from the household, and

condemned to exile, the Serbatoffs were also arrested and similarly condemned.

They had, at first, been sent to Tobolsk; but the Princess Marie, or her friends, had still sufficient interest with some of the minor functionaries of government, to contrive, that according to her wish, the family should be removed to Pelem; and, at the very time when Ivan was declaiming against them, they had arrived at their place of destination.

The Princess did not know that Ivan was there, nor did she even know that he was exiled. These condemnations came so suddenly, and were so swiftly executed, that even an exile's intimate friends might not, for some time, know anything about the calamity which had befallen him. And there was now no longer any intimacy between the Serbatoffs and Ivan de Biron.

The associations which the Princess had with the town and neighbourhood of Pelem, could not have been very painful, or, if painful, were still very dear to her; otherwise she would hardly have made the effort, which she did, to get their

place of residence changed from Tobolsk to Pelem. The Prince was quite indifferent as regards the matter. All places, but where the Court was, were equally distasteful and odious to him. He was one of those men, not uncommonly found in the higher classes of all countries, and notably in our own, who, from their earliest years, having been accustomed to the management of great affairs, acquire an almost passionate love for business, and can in no other way employ their eager, active minds.

The Prince, in his former term of exile, neither tailored, nor cobbled, nor taught at schools; nor, though he thought himself a skilful amateur, did he ever assist at the musical entertainments of the exiles. The phrase, so often used in describing the fate of men situated as he was, really did apply to him. "He languished in exile." But for the loving care of his daughter, and for the love he bore to her, he might soon have died from sheer incapacity to take any interest in life.

One unpleasant topic was sometimes discussed between the father and the daughter. She might

have married into the Bestuchef family. "We should all have been saved, then," he would exclaim. Against this excellent arrangement there was only the foolish reason on her part that she did not like the particular Bestuchef in question.

"I am sure I never loved your mother before we married, and you know how happy we were," he would reply. "Ah! the Dolgorouckis (the late Princess was a Dolgoroucki) were everything then."

Pelem had, in the course of the last few years, increased in size and importance. A new branch of trade had been established there, that of furs of the coarser kind; and there were now some small houses of a better class than the log huts which had been occupied by the exiles in former days. The Serbatoffs had one of these small houses allotted to them.

The society of the town, too, had improved. Field Marshal Münnich was there, occupying the house of his old enemy, the Duke of Courland. This great general was not to be subdued by

adversity. He taught a school: he built a church: he was, in fact, one of those men who bring with them life and animation wherever they go, and who maintain a certain cheerfulness under whatever adverse circumstances they may be placed.

Ivan remained in ignorance that the Serbatoffs were his companions in misfortune, and that their dwelling was not more than a stone's throw from his own log hut—the one, by the way, which the Serbatoffs had inhabited previously, and which Ivan had contrived to gain for himself, giving up in exchange one of the smaller houses which had been assigned to him. The friendly feeling of the junior clerk had not exhausted itself in naming a place of exile for Ivan which he thought would be preferred by him; but had subsequently ensured an especially favourable treatment for him at this place of exile.

And here it may be remarked, that the quality which had gained for Ivan much favour from this junior clerk, was one which sometimes injured his reputation. The world is slow to believe

in the truthfulness of very kind people, and indeed, mostly goes further than that, and is wont to suspect untruthfulness in them. This can hardly ever be otherwise, for most persons are prone to assign motives to any action they contemplate; and those motives must be such as, in some measure, accord with their own feelings or experience. When, therefore, a very kind-hearted man goes beyond the average kindness of other persons, in his conduct or behaviour, the majority of men, not being able to imagine a degree of kindness which is foreign to their own natures and experience, must invent a motive for such conduct or behaviour, other than mere kindliness.

Ivan, who, from his earliest years, had devoted himself to the doing of kindly actions, for which he possessed great opportunity when he was the Duke of Courland's Secretary, had, amongst undiscerning people, the reputation of not having been altogether a true man. It was a very self-seeking age; the Court of Russia afforded a field for very sinister actions and designs; and Ivan underwent the danger, which is always expe-

rienced by one who is morally in advance of the people, amongst whom his lot is thrown—a danger fully equal to that of being intellectually in advance of those with whom it is a man's fate to live.

It was not surprising that Ivan remained ignorant for some time of the presence at Pelem of the Serbatoff family. He had become a great student. Originally having received what was thought a good education for those days, he had greatly strengthened that education during his former exile, when he was in the same house with his master the Duke of Courland.

The means for doing so were afforded to him in this way. The Duke's judicial examination at Schlüsselberg, previously to his exile at Pelem, had been far less unfavourable to him than his enemies had expected. He had, moreover, written a letter to the late Duchess Regent, which could hardly be read, even by an enemy, without eliciting some admiration for the Duke's character, and some sympathy for his hard fate. It was a dignified and noble letter. In it, the

Duke declared that he wanted nothing for himself, no alleviation of his own sufferings, but merely that the Duchess Regent should not punish those friends and relations of his who were totally guiltless of offence to her.

Certain it is the Duke's conduct, on his downfall, won so much favour with the Duchess Regent as to cause some solace to be provided for him in his exile. His books were sent to him. It may be doubted whether the moody, miserable man derived much comfort from these books, or whether he even looked into them; but Ivan profited by them, and was encouraged by the Duke to prosecute his studies. Now, in Ivan's second time of exile, ardent study was his only comfort, and the great satirists were his favourite authors. He was never weary of reading Horace, Rabelais, Molière and Montaigne.

With none of the other exiles, but Nariskoff, had Ivan made any acquaintance: and consequently he was not likely to hear from them of the addition that had been made to their number.

Twenty-four hours had not passed after the arrival of Prince Serbatoff and his motherless daughter (the Princess Serbatoff had died at St. Petersburg,) before the busy, prying Nariskoff was aware of that arrival. A great scheme entered into his head—a scheme combining that good nature of his early days when he was loving to his serfs, with the cynical superstructure which he had allowed to rise upon, and, for the most part, to crush, his earlier hopes and aspirations.

He would ascertain whether the Princess was this cruel, vain, proud woman that Ivan depicted her to be ; and whether there was any of that affection for the young man still remaining in her breast, which he had described (in most exaggerated terms, as Nariskoff suspected) as having existed in former days. What especially delighted Nariskoff in his plan, and what he anticipated would be endless food for satirical enjoyment, was that he would be able to play upon the vanity of both of them, making them believe

that each was almost dying with love for the other. Nariskoff rubbed his hands with delight when he thought of this, and imagined how he should bring it about.

“The fools, the fools!” he exclaimed to himself. “They talk of love, but omit the little word that should always go before it—‘self.’ Let me see, I shall be fifty-seven my next birthday, and I am not exactly the man whom young ladies fall in love with. Yet if there were but another amiable Nariskoff to plead my cause with any young maiden, telling her that I was dying for love of her, I should succeed, I know I should. No satirists—not Ivan’s Horaces, Molières, or Montaignes—have ever sounded the deep sea of human vanity; or, if they sounded it, did not read off their soundings to the world. They dare not do so. No man would believe them if they did: none at least if we except the two or three wise men of their time; and there are few Nariskoffs, I trow, besides the one in Russia, in this generation.”

Thus Nariskoff reasoned. For some days he

was almost as moody as Ivan himself, deeply meditating his great project, and contriving that Ivan should, for the present, be kept in ignorance of the arrival of the Serbatoffs, until he, Nariskoff, had matured his plan, and commenced its execution.

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER III.

NARISKOFF MEETS THE PRINCESS MARIE.

It was not long before Nariskoff found the opportunity he sought for. He had haunted the wood adjoining Pelem at all hours of the day; and it was towards the evening of the ninth day after the Princess Marie's arrival, that he was fortunate enough to meet her walking in that cleared pathway in the forest which led towards the town. She was not alone, being followed by a white dog marked here and there with black spots about the head, of the bull-terrier species—that most affectionate and most

intelligent of the canine race, as those affirm it to be who understand its very expressive, though as some think, very uncomely countenance. Having been brought from England, it had received the name of Ingel.

Nariskoff at once accosted the Princess.

"I almost wonder to find you, Princess, walking here alone. Are you not afraid?"

"No, not with Ingel at my side. It would be but faint praise to say that he is a truer friend than most men; but he is a truer friend than most dogs; and that is, indeed, saying something worth saying in his favour."

Meanwhile Ingel, finding himself the subject of conversation, looked up at Nariskoff and made those expressive winkings of the eyes, and movements of the nose which, in that race of dogs, indicate somewhat of doubt, and somewhat of dislike. Nariskoff bent down to pat the animal, but this indication of friendship was only received by a threatening growl, upon which Nariskoff ceased to make any further demonstrations of friendly regard.

“But why are *you* here, Nariskoff? I should not have thought that they would have cared to rid themselves of you, though I doubt not you were much more guilty than ourselves, with that provoking tongue of yours, which must run on in censure, even when our Empress is the subject of the conversation.”

It may here be remarked that Nariskoff, notwithstanding the little aid or service he had rendered to the Princess's family when they were last in exile, was somewhat of a favourite of hers. Like many other persons of a satirical turn, she was not sorry to listen to the satire which she would not condescend, herself, to utter.

She resumed the conversation, by asking him whether he had had any other punishment to undergo, thus delicately referring to the knout. He answered, “No.” She then spoke in detail, and with much bitterness, of the cruelty that had been exercised upon the Countess Lapouschin, whereupon he said, “Who is imprudent now, Princess?”

“I can trust you, Nariskoff. You would not harm us, though I cannot say that the last time we were in this horrid place, you proved yourself a faithful friend.”

“A starving man, Princess, has little time for friendship. Friendship is a luxury. The full-fed can afford to be friendly. But is there anything I can do now?”

“Nothing, Nariskoff. It must be said for Elizabeth that she is not so barbarous as Biron was; and we have enough to eat and drink and sufficient fuel to warm our wretched selves with, though, for my part, I am not sure whether this is any kindness to us.”

Nariskoff thought that there was now a good opportunity for bringing about some talk upon the subject he had in view; and he replied.

“You did not then, Princess, find the labour so severe last time? Doubtless it was lightened by companionship? I think there used to be a young man—”

“Yes, several persons were good enough last time to aid me in what I could do for my poor

father and mother. I wish I could remember, Nariskoff, that you had been one of them."

After this rebuff, to which Nariskoff could make no reply, they walked on in silence for some little time, until, on the return towards the town, they came to that spot which has so often been mentioned in this story—the seat on which the lovers in former days had sat.

The Princess remained standing here for some minutes, though Nariskoff beckoned to her to take the seat near to the tree, which, as he remarked, seemed to have been made by some benevolent person, happily combining art with nature.

The Princess sat down: whereupon Nariskoff observed that there were some persons, though, who evidently thought that there was danger in sitting there.

"The other day," said he, "I was walking with a young man,—not so very young though,—for there are some of those stupid grey hairs on his head as on mine, which give one most unwelcome hints—"

“Well, but about the young old man, Nariskoff? What did he do to you?”

“He took me by the shoulders in the rudest manner, lifted me up, and said I must not sit there. He is a very wild young man—half-crazed, I think,—always talking of the injuries which women have done him—empresses and actresses and princesses. You know that I have some little gift of speech; but I can make nothing of him. He will not listen to me when I endeavour to persuade him that women are the crown of creation, — consolers, comforters, sympathizers—their companionship the one joy for man, overcoming all his sorrows; and that, at the bottom of Pandora’s casket, it was not Hope, as those hard ancients say, but woman’s love that was lying there, in itself sufficient to control and conquer all forms of human misery and suffering.”

The Princess looked fixedly and inquiringly at Nariskoff while he was uttering this tirade; but his impassive countenance did not betray any particular or private interest in the subject. He continued:

“You must have seen him. He was here when we were last here, Princess. Some people go to Paris, some to Vienna, more than once in their life-time. We choose Pelem; do we not? A lovely, luxuriant spot! What charming colours the morasses afford for artists! ‘You were, yourself, no mean amateur, Princess, if I recollect rightly. Well, but about this young man, this woman-hater: he was a Secretary of Courland’s. If I recollect rightly, you gave him letters home. He was recalled, you know, before we were. A Baron now, Baron Ivan de Biron.”

The Princess concealed her emotion by the expression of great astonishment. “What, is he here? I thought he was in high favour with the Empress.”

“No,” replied Nariskoff; “the young man must have told the truth on some occasion. It is difficult to break oneself of that bad habit. I should not have been with you in this wood, Princess, but for my truthful nature. The Baron occupies that splendid residence which was once

graced by your fair presence. I sometimes honour him by my good company. But he is a dull dog. He has only one subject to talk about, and no novelty in that. The Empress is not the only lady he rails at. You should have heard his abuse at this very spot of all your faithless, wicked sex."

"Then Azra, I mean Madame Hurtaldi the great actress, is not gracious to him," she replied; "for it was said that he was her devoted lover. Such at least was common report. I've often seen him at St. Petersburg; and he was very kind to my father when we were last here."

"You will not see much of him now, Princess, for he is always at his books. The young man threatens to become a dull pedant. If it were not a cruel thing to say, I am so glad that you are here, for now I shall have somebody to talk to. He is so wearisome. And then, as you may imagine, we are inclined to quarrel. What can one say to a fellow who has only got to tell one that women are false, cold-hearted, perverse, sly,

treacherous, I know not what. You know how differently I think, Princess. The last time we were here, I am sure I thought he was talking of some wild animal of the woods; but it proved to be only a woman that was in his thoughts."

"A woman?" said the Princess.

"No: all women. But there was one who was worse than the rest. Some peasant girl whom he had known here. The Baron's loves are not of an exalted kind. All other women, bad as they are, were good when compared with her. She was the falsest of the false. I suppose she loved some other youth when he went away."

"Never!" exclaimed the Princess.

"You knew her then?" said Nariskoff.

"No," replied the Princess. "I only speak for the honour of our sex. Men lay their falseness upon us; and what they call our falseness is but a faint reflection of their own."

"I wish you had been here the other day, Princess. I should then have had an ally; and

should have been happy to fight under your banner.”

The Princess was silent for a minute, meditating what response she should make. It was infinitely vexatious to her to think that this talkative, satirical man knew, perhaps, more than he pretended to know about the former relations between Ivan and herself. She recollected, as if it had been yesterday, how their parting at Pelem had been suddenly broken off by the appearance of Nariskoff and his attendant fool, Matchka, in the street. To plead anything like ignorance of Ivan, or, indeed, to pretend that her relations with him had been otherwise than most friendly, would only arouse, or deepen, this man's suspicions. She, therefore, said :

“ I cannot tell you, Nariskoff, how sorry I am to hear this news. We had the greatest regard for Ivan de Biron—both my father and myself. Indeed, the Prince was most anxious to be of service to him at Court ; but his rise was too rapid to allow of my father's being of any use to him. Ivan should not rail against the Em-

press, for she was his greatest benefactress ; and that, too, after he had taken an active part against her on that memorable night of her seizure of the throne. I heard the Empress, myself, tell all about it. And as for Azra, (I knew her well before she became the great Madame Hurtaldi) I am sure she could not have been unkind to him."

It was not without set purpose that the Princess had, in the foregoing sentences, used Ivan's christian name, in order to show that she readily acknowledged a certain intimacy. Nariskoff resumed the conversation.

"Yes, I agree with you, Princess. This Azra, as you call her, was not the worst-behaved young lady. It was the peasant girl of whom he spoke with most bitterness—the one who had deceived him here. I am not a very clever man in love matters, but I would lay my life that she had sat upon that seat where you are sitting now, Princess. That's the reason why he dragged me up from it so angrily. He would be jealous of your sitting there, I dare say. Try him some

day, Princess, if you should happen to meet with him."

"My good Nariskoff," she replied, "Ivan de Biron was a great friend of mine when we were last here, and I do not see why I should repay his former kindness by endeavouring to plague him with the remembrance of a lost love."

"I don't know that she is lost," replied Nariskoff. "He spoke of her still with a sort of fond bitterness that made me think that she was still very dear to him—dearer than all. This could hardly be, if she had married some peasant youth of her own standing. She is somewhere far away; or, at least he seemed to think so, when he was talking of her."

"The young man appears to be somewhat liberal in his loves and likings," said the Princess. "We certainly heard at St. Petersburg, that he followed the Signora Hurtaldi everywhere."

As she said these words, the Princess stooped down, apparently to aid in the researches which Ingel was busily making at a suspected hole

near her feet. But this gesture might have been made to conceal from Nariskoff the expression in her face which she felt she could not master.

“I know but little, as I said before of love matters,” Nariskoff replied; “but I have noticed that this liberality of liking, or loving, is apt to come upon a man who has met with some great disappointment which he never forgets.”

“I plead equal ignorance with you, Nariskoff, without having your fineness of observation as regards other people. But, methinks, we have talked enough of this somewhat gloomy subject, for I pity Ivan very much. He was such a good and kind young fellow in former days. I suppose that success has somewhat spoilt him. Ah, Nariskoff, you have not been tried in that crucible. It might remove all that superfluous good nature which must now be so troublesome to you.”

Nariskoff was somewhat nettled by this speech, and was preparing a sharp reply, but the Prin-

cess, who was anxious to bring the conversation to an end, interrupted his meditations.

“See how beseechingly Ingel looks up at me,” she exclaimed. “Not being able to induce that rat or squirrel he has been looking after, to keep him company, he wishes me to take some notice of him. And besides he almost says, it is getting very cold. I think we ought to go home. Have you ever observed, Nariskoff, but perhaps you don’t care about animals, how much dogs resemble men, in their love of change, and their fickleness of purpose. They are wild to come out; and then wild to get home again. They must have picked up this changeful humour from the men they have lived with so much; and Ingel, though the best dog in the world, is not in this respect superior to his race. You need not come with me. He is sufficient protection, and I must not shorten your walk. The light of the moon is most favourable to the meditations of such philosophers as you are.”

So saying, the Princess rose from her seat;

and, bowing to Nariskoff, walked swiftly towards the town.

When left to himself, Nariskoff exclaimed: "A clever girl, a very clever girl; but not so clever as she thinks. How well she parried, though, my best home-thrusts. I wouldn't mind being in love with her myself, if it were any use to be so. It is a very stupid thing of Nature that makes us least agreeable to look at when we are most agreeable to talk to. Besides the wisest men, from Socrates downwards, have never been happy in their management of these women. It takes all one's time, you see, to manage any one of them: and we wise men have seldom this time to spare. But perhaps, after all, Nature is right. When we question her closely she has generally a good answer to give us. We should then be too loveable, if we were not to diminish in beauty as we advance in wisdom. No, no, it would not do. They would be too miserable when they had to part from us."

It was in such thoughts as these that Nariskoff

indulge during the short time that he remained in the forest, to enjoy the brightness of the moon, which the Princess had told him was so favourable to the meditations of the philosophic mind.

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER IV.

NARISKOFF'S SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEW WITH IVAN DE BIRON—IVAN'S STATE OF MIND—THE PRINCESS MARIE'S FEELINGS.

NARISKOFF resolved now to commence his attack in the other quarter. He paid a visit to Ivan in his log-hut; and found the young man, as usual, deeply immersed in his studies. He was reading the *De Senectute* of Cicero, which naturally led to Nariskoff's uttering sundry sayings about youth and old age. It was his cue not to appear to have any particular design in this visit, and so he was pleased to find any

general subject which he could readily discuss. He said that he believed there was once one man who was contented with his age, and this was a middle-aged man. The same man was also contented with his height, and did not wish to be an inch taller or shorter. Boys long to clamber up to youthhood: youths, what fools! aspire to manhood: men of mature age sigh for the light-hearted joys of youth: and old men revenge themselves upon the world for not growing as dull as they do, by bestowing upon it all the tediousness of old age. Ivan listened with impatience to his friend's comments, not very novel, on this subject, and showed a wish to resume his studies.

Then Nariskoff brought forth the great news which he had come to tell—namely the arrival of the exiled Prince Serbatoff and his daughter at Pelem. The somewhat malicious narrator enjoyed the confusion and excitement which this intelligence, he could easily see, produced in Ivan's mind. There was no longer any wish on Ivan's part to resume the study of the *De Senec-*

tute, for he sought with eagerness to extract from Nariskoff every detail that he could tell him. What was the cause of their exile? Was she looking well? Was she altered? Did she know who were her companions in exile? Ivan did not venture to ask the question directly, Did she know that he was there?

Nariskoff's replies grew colder and more reserved as Ivan's questioning became more and more eager. At length the wily man proposed a walk in the forest—a proposal which was readily accepted by Ivan, in the hope of hearing something more about the Serbatoffs.

It was when they were alone in that vast wood that Nariskoff gave full vent to his imaginative powers. He was not the kind of man to keep within the sober bounds of truth, when he had a purpose in hand—a purpose too, of which he was very proud. He narrated the conversation which he had had with the Princess, but did not fail to throw in sundry starts, and sighs, and blushes, which that proud young woman would have been the last person in the world to have

indulged in, especially in the presence of one whose malicious character she knew so well as she did that of Nariskoff.

Ivan saw at once that the picture was highly coloured, but still there was something in it which was very interesting to him, and which he could not make up his mind wholly to disbelieve. One part was certainly true, and that was the aversion which Nariskoff described as being his feeling towards that "detestable animal," "that little English brute" which the Princess made so much of. But then, as he said, they always make so much of those creatures when they have nothing else to pet.

The conversation was a long one ; and when it had ended, and when Ivan was at home and alone again, it furnished him with much food for thought.

The state of Ivan's mind, as regards his affections, was at this time, most bewildered and most miserable. It has before been mentioned that the ideal of life to him, the great object of his ambition, had been to be supremely loved.

This is by no means a high order of ambition. The saying "If I love thee, what is that to thee," indicates a much higher and nobler form of the affections ; but it would be depicting the character of this young man falsely, if it were said that he was capable of this, the noblest form of loving. On the contrary, it is not unfair to him to say that this desire to be loved, descended even into a desire to be liked ; and had, perhaps, been the cause of his anxiety to be kind and gracious to all those with whom he had any converse, and to win even the minor affections of his fellow-men.

He had once, and for all, given up the hope of winning such love from Azra as would satisfy him. Had she sought him out, even in exile, he would not have accepted her love burdened with the condition that her art was to partake that love with him. After much thought he had renounced her ; and, with that renunciation, had given up all hopes of being loved as he desired to be. He was singularly alone in the world. He had parted from his family when young. He

had not detected, though perhaps it was there, any loving regard on the part of his master, the Duke of Courland ; and the friendship which he had offered to his brother private secretary, the Englishman, had been received in a truly British manner, in which poor Ivan did not perceive any of the warmth and real kindness which lay under it. All these causes had driven him into a studious life ; and even before this, his second exile, he had borne the character in St. Petersburg of a moody, studious man. The Empress, while he was in favour, used to speak of him as her young scholar ; and would playfully ask him, when receiving his reports, what the wisdom of the ancients was pleased to say that could enlighten us about our modern doings. Elizabeth had really entertained a great liking for the unworldly young man, as she thought him to be ; had thoroughly believed in his fidelity ; and had been all the more enraged when the reports of those vile spies, grossly exaggerated, told of his presence at entertainments where her character

and conduct had been so maliciously, if so justly, defamed.

It would be untruthful to say that Ivan did not often think of the Princess Marie; and now, at Pelem, there were many things that recalled those reminiscences which he could not but feel were still so dear to him. He marvelled though at her baseness. It deepened all his severe and bitter views of human nature when he revisited those spots, which had been the silent witnesses of those mutual vows of undying affection which had so often been exchanged between them according to the usual practice of lovers, who must say the same thing, in the same words, over and over again.

And what were her feelings? They were the same as they had ever been. She was the really true lover, whose love had never changed; who had loved him even the most at the time when, thinking their love hopeless, and desiring that it should not be the ruin of his life, she had sought, alas too skilfully! to divert that love into another channel. The Searcher of all hearts

could only know in its fulness, what that devoted girl had suffered, while she had endeavoured to make Azra worthy of the love of Ivan, and when she found that her efforts had been successful.

Much was altered now. Ivan was no longer an obscure youth, but one whom statesmen had been wont to recognize as a rising young man. Although the Serbatoffs and Ivan had rarely met in the society of St. Petersburg, there was no one so well acquainted with all the details of his career, with all the hopes that lay before him, as the Princess Marie. She had even fought his battle for him with Azra; and Ivan little imagined that on that very day, a day so fatal to him, as he thought, when Azra refused his offer, and when the officer demanded from him his sword previously to conveying him to Schlüsselburg, the Princess Marie had been closeted with Azra, and had pleaded Ivan's cause, with all the eloquence of which she was mistress.

Had Ivan still been true to the Princess, there might no longer have been much difficulty with her father. The Prince was now a thoroughly

broken-spirited man. Even if he should be recalled, of which he had no hope, his courtier-like sagacity foresaw that his time had passed, and that there was but little chance for him of being reinstated in that official place and power which were so dear to him. He had become utterly dependent upon his daughter; and she knew that it was no longer his will, but hers, which governed.

Nariskoff's talk, though she greatly doubted the man's sincerity, had not been without its effect upon her. Proud as she was, her pride could not contend against her love; and she longed, with all the longing that she had known in her earlier days of courtship, to see Ivan again, and to discover if any relic, even the faintest, existed of his former great affection for her. This was a very humble thought for the haughty Princess to entertain; but it was as sincere and genuine as it was humble.

That beneficent law of compensation, which applies to most human affairs, was not wholly inert when dealing even with such a calamity as

exile. There are few things more desirable for a human being than that there should be sudden breaks in the ordinary routine of his existence. Great kings were wont, in ancient times, to go into retreat in monasteries, from whence, let us hope, they occasionally emerged as better men. Exile, terrible as it was, afforded one of those breaks in the continuity of life which are often so serviceable to the soul. The course of most men's inner lives is like that of one who is placed upon an inclined plane; and, when once started, the man descends in an unvarying fashion, and with only the change that is produced by accelerated speed. There is little opportunity for a profound review, to be made by himself, of his conduct, his opinions, or his habits.

The exile, on the contrary, diverted from all his former occupations, entering upon what might well be called a new life, with new companions, new surrounding scenery, above all new relations to the fellow-creatures who were nearest to him, must, perforce, have entertained new thoughts; and though, humanly speaking,

it may appear to have been a great disaster for men like Marshal Münnich and the Duke of Courland to have been suddenly wrenched from power and sent into exile, it was perhaps one of the greatest benefits which could have been provided for them. Though this effect was, naturally, most potent and most vivid in cases such as theirs, it was also very potent in the case of those younger and minor personages, such as Ivan de Biron and the Princess Marie, who were subjected to it.

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